

FATHERLY ABSENTEEISM IN THE AFRICAN-AMERICAN
CULTURE OF THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

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ABSTRACT

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The Model in Ministry focused on the residual effects of slavery and when counteracted with biblical liberation, African-American males are more likely to be freed from their weakened mentality of absenteeism. The model revealed that African-American males can be restored rightfully to God, family, and society. The model also provided a viable solution to youth, adolescents, and single parent mothers in the African-American community to absenteeism that takes a proactive measure in preparing African-American males for their responsibilities in the church and the community. A qualitative research methodology, focus groups, pilot studies, and participant observations were used as measurable outcomes.

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DEDICATION

I personally dedicate the culmination of this work to my children who have given me the opportunity to practice and perfect fatherhood as an African-American man. As my children, I vow to never abandon, disregard, or vacate the honor and privilege of being your father, and thank you for claiming me as “The World’s Greatest Dad.”

I also personally dedicate this work to notable men in my journey that stood in the gap of fatherly absenteeism and assumed the responsibility of pouring success and destiny in my life. Specifically, Clyde Scott, Cleopatrick House, Edward Preciado, Mark Taylor, and Hosea Wheeler. One day I aspire to be as influential and impactful in the life of some young male as you were in mine.

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth being compared with
the glory that is about to be revealed to us and in us and for us and conferred on us!

– Romans 8:18 AMP

INTRODUCTION

Fatherly absenteeism in the African-American community of the Twenty-First Century is significant because I am the product of an African-American father who neglected his responsibilities of five sons. Growing up without a biological father had significant impacts on the perspectives and importance of an active, engaged father in the home. Throughout various ministerial opportunities, children of absentee fathers became a personal passion, yet a conviction, to help eradicate this epidemic and perpetual cycle in the African-American community. A father's bond, influence, and presence with his children solidify a foundation that holistically promotes healthy relationships and strong family dynamics. Having four brothers that shared in the experience of fatherly absenteeism who now have their own children has molded each of us with different ambitions as fathers. The unsearchable quest that has remained unanswered is the desire to know how differently our beliefs as fathers would vary if our biological father was influential and present in our lives. This relentless pursuit to bond fathers with their offspring is compelling enough to warrant a research that will assist in offsetting the negative effects that stem from fatherly absenteeism.

The ethos of the context in which the focus of fatherly absenteeism will be addressed primarily is a small-targeted audience of the Moses Missionary Baptist Church, and a relatively larger audience in the city of Augusta, GA. Since there are many children

in this particular congregation that are currently experiencing the abandonment of biological fathers, it is behooving for the launching of the focus of ministry to start within the church. Given that there are at least fifty children who are products of absentee fathers, this group gives credible purpose to gather information and research the trends of fatherly absenteeism in the African-American culture, and more specifically, the local church. From a general consensus and overall observation, the number of absentee fathers in the church is spiraling, challenging the leadership of the church to address this matter immediately if the church is going to promote healthy families and relationships. Being in existence for over a century, the local church and its leaders has identified the rapid increase of fatherly absenteeism within the congregation over the last forty years, and has not launched any programs or initiatives to combat the blaze of absentee fathers. Without any viable solution, the church is experiencing a perpetual cycle of behavior spawned from the previous generation of absentee fathers.

The secondary context in which the focus of fatherly absenteeism will be addressed is to a particular community within the city of Augusta that is plagued with absentee fathers. In Richmond County, specifically the 30901 zip code area, host the most violence, crime, and children of absentee fathers. There are more African-American residents in this area than any other area of the city, and unfortunately have become Augusta's most poverty-stricken, high crime and drug activity neighborhoods. Nestled beneath a majority of this criminal activity is the African-American male that populates 90% of Augusta's inmates. An extremely high percent of those inmates are fathers, consequently, neglecting their presence in the lives of their children. With an extremely large population of absentee fathers, a partnership with the Historic Tabernacle Baptist

Church of Augusta will provide additional resources necessary to ensure a meaningful impact on the community addressing fatherly absenteeism. Therefore, the focus of ministry in relation to fatherly absenteeism is twofold: (1) to address the issue within the congregation of the Moses Missionary Baptist Church that has approximately fifty children suffering from absentee fathers, and (2) to partner with the Historic Tabernacle Baptist Church of Augusta to target a much larger population of African-American fatherly absenteeism within a specific community that is statistically spiraling and suffering these effects. These combined efforts will begin a model to other local churches to help eradicate fatherly absenteeism. With a combined partnership of resources and efforts between the local church and the community, the fight against fatherly absenteeism in the African-American culture can finally begin to heal and restore a lost and destroyed family dynamic.

The local church has always had a voice of influence in the African-American community. With most of its focus on the injustices of civil rights half a century ago, a strong undercurrent of fatherly absenteeism was brewing, and the African-American church awakened to a painful reality, several years later, that men were not present in their homes and fathering their children. A generation of African-American fathers grew weary in the fight against racism, and the weight of balancing a home, while being target practice for discrimination, became too heavy of a fight for many males to overcome. Birth into this consequential reality, there is a conjunction between the personal experiences of being abandoned by my father and the context in which many children can readily identify with my experience. There is a synergistic bond between the two because both have been affected by the ailments of fatherly absenteeism. Furthermore, both are

looking to the church and community for a solution that will attempt to provide some alternatives to children who suffer from the absence of their fathers, and a platform that promotes functional future fathers that have addressed their pains of neglect as a child that will begin a healthy healing process.

With the spiritual autobiography and context analysis works, both summarized and focused has lead for research, professional and personal growth in the theme of Preaching and Leadership: A Study of Fatherly Absenteeism in the African-American Culture of the Twenty-First Century. Key issues that will be addressed in each chapter of this research includes my personal experiences as one affected by fatherly absenteeism and the context in ministry for which the foundations of my theory is implemented; assessing the biblical support and basis for the ministry of project and to help explain from a biblical stance why specifically the African-American culture has resulted in males not understanding their purpose; assessing the historical occurrences that have resulted in an epidemic of male absenteeism in the African-American culture; providing leading theological ideas to help support the underlying reason for fatherly absenteeism; assessing contemporary foundations research that discusses the ideas of other experts on the subject matter; assessing the statistical data in the church that evaluates African-American individuals directly affected by absentee fathers; unveiling a ministry model that will address the ailments of absentee fathers in the African-American culture that is plain, portable, and practical; launching a Men's Ministry in the author's immediate context of ministry that pilot the ministry model, assess the results, and make adjustments if necessary to improve outcomes of producing more responsible African-American males and fathers; conducting interviews with single-parent mothers who are raising

African-American children, and gain further insight from their perspective; and, the need to continue to engage in research through various sources that express interest in the African-American family dynamics and the issues that ails this culture. These key issues will provide the scholarly skeletal system of this entire presentation.

African-American fatherly absenteeism is an historical dilemma that mandates a theological liberation based upon biblical truths that will guide its theoretical outcomes. African-American fathers who neglect their responsibilities as fathers are not solely at fault for their psychological and spiritual struggles that has been embedded in those men from a residual effect of slavery. For a theoretical outcome to be beneficial in reducing the alarming statistical rates of fatherly absenteeism in the African-American communities, the truth of the historical events of slavery must be owned and acknowledged as a starting point for the absenteeism in the twenty-first century, and the biblical applications must correlate from a theological scope that liberates African-Americans. When the historical affairs, biblical examples, theological liberation, and theoretical applications align in a synergistic manner, fatherly absenteeism may have a practical solution to alter its current course of demise and begin to restore African-American males to their respective positions and vocations as active fathers.

The proposed treatment hypothesis designed to address the theme and problem of fatherly absenteeism in the African-American community is an initiative launched by Dr. John E. Guns entitled *Operation Save Our Sons*. One major area of focus from this initiative is to implement strategic plans that will rescue children from the abandonment of fathers through education and building stronger father-son relationships. A fairly new initiative, *Operation Save Our Sons* has reported success in the area of fatherly

absenteeism, providing resources to single-parents and outreaching to youth who are experiencing life without the presence of their fathers. The partnership between the Historic Tabernacle Baptist Church and Moses Missionary Baptist Church will host an *Operation Save Our Sons* event in the city of Augusta that will begin a long-term effort at addressing fatherly absenteeism. The expectation is that the ailments of fatherly absenteeism in the African-American communities of Augusta are made aware with aspirations that the fathers will become more involved and active as responsible parents. Additionally, children of absentee fathers will be positively impacted by the initiative and have outlets within their church and community for support and resources.

Finally, the challenge of fatherly absenteeism in the African-American culture requires a commitment to a lifelong work of transformation that relates more to the endurance of a marathon rather than a sprint. This research provided is a continuation of previous work by notable persons who have challenged themselves to aid in this spiraling epidemic. My attempt is to simply give additional insight that may provoke a deeper thought, illuminate the mind, and inspire others to continue the work. This presentation is not a total solution to fatherly absenteeism in the African-American culture, but rather a catalyst to help facilitate the necessary changes to foster a stronger dynamic in the family, church, community, and general society of African-Americans.

CHAPTER ONE

MINISTRY FOCUS

Deeply understanding the neglect and abandonment of fatherly absenteeism experienced in my own personal journey necessitates a desire for research and growth intrinsically and contextually in ministry. This chapter will recall persons, places, and problems that had formative impacts along the journey. Ultimately, this chapter will conclude by merging synergistic twines of my spiritual formation and the context in ministry that affords me the opportunity to practice my stance in research of Father Absenteeism in the African-American Culture of the Twenty-First Century.

Spiritual Journey

I was born July 19, 1977 and reared in a small country setting called Ashdown, Arkansas. My actual birthplace is in Texarkana, Texas but because the town was so small expecting parents had to go to a larger city to give birth to their children. I am the second child of five sons as my elder brother being five years older than me and my mother gave birth to a child subsequently every year. My mother became pregnant with my older brother when she was a senior in high school at the age of seventeen and she gave birth to my older brother when she turned nineteen years old and had graduated from high school. Two years later my mother and my father became married. The town of my rearing is

relatively comprised of family. My maternal grandmother and all of her children, mainly my uncles and aunts, all lived in this small town. Being very family oriented, we always had an opportunity to be in the company of many cousins and close relatives. The town of Ashdown is so small that it is generally not shown on a geographical map and oftentimes residents would refer their location to the nearest, largest city, which is Little Rock, AR.

My early childhood experiences are with mixed emotions, and as much as I would like to say many of those memories were positive, they were not. Since my mother and father decided after my older brother to have children every year, which we are actually separated by nine months, when it came to my mother giving birth to her fifth son she faced a lot of medical and health challenges because she did not allow her body to recuperate from the previous births. I distinctly remember living with my grandmother for several months and actually spent a whole winter season with her to include the Christmas season because my mother and father were in the hospital by the bedside of my youngest brother. He was born with multiple health issues that made life very complicated for him and our family. I did not quite understand why my mother and father were away at the time for so many months while we lived with my grandmother and spent Christmas with her instead of our immediate family. However, it was not until he was allowed to come home that I realized why he had to spend so much time under the watchful eye of many doctors and physicians.

I remember when my mother and father brought my baby brother home for the first time and how tiny, frail and fragile he was and how he looked so different from my other brothers. My baby brother was blind, was not able to walk, and could not talk. The

circumference of his head was not round or oval shaped like most persons, but it was more of a rectangular shape and flattened. His skeletal system was clearly seen through his skin and could easily determine that the deformation of his joints would be complicated for him to be mobile and agile like normal children. The first day in the home my mother laid him on the couch and all my brothers circled around him, and instantly we loved and embraced our baby brother cautiously of whom we have heard so much about communicated from the hospital which was several hours away from where we lived. Upon laying my youngest brother on the couch I noticed that my mother walked outside and was pacing in the grass of our home. It was not until I was a little older that my mother shared with me that she went outside and was walking in the grass because the doctors informed her the baby would only live to be two months old. Actually, while my mother was prenatal, the doctors had extreme concern for the birth of my brother and when he was born they suggested that he would live to only be two days old. Medical technology in the early 1980s was not as advanced as today and although doctors had given him only two days to live, my brother actually was a miracle child and made it two weeks. Reaching the miraculous milestone of two weeks of life, doctors revisited their diagnosis and told my mother that he would live to be two months and by the grace of God and the medical care of doctors and nurses he lived to be two months old. When he turned two months old, doctors decided that continued care for him would not be in the best interests of the child nor would it be financially feasible for my parents or the hospital to keep him in their care. So, my parents decided that if the life of my brother was going to be short-lived then he would die peacefully amongst his brothers and love ones in Ashdown, Arkansas.

As anyone can imagine, the health condition of my youngest brother created a lot of strain on my family living in such a small town. Many people were skeptical as they attempted to formulate their own ideas and opinions as to why my baby brother was born with so many health defects. Sometimes, growing up in a small town you have to wrestle with the small mentality of people and adjust to their own insecurities and ignorance. My brothers and I were often teased in school because, although four of us were born very healthy, physically strong and athletic, we had a baby brother at home who was not physically capable of engaging in activities that we were afforded to participate in.

Whenever a classmate wanted to make one of us mad, ill speaking of our baby brother was always the magic trigger. My brothers and I were often teased and ridiculed by our classmates, but we would often hear comments and remarks made by adults. Many small town people from my experience do not have a problem with voicing their opinion, and consequently, we overheard a lot of opinions made about my little brother. Every imaginable accusation that anyone could think of was thrown at the reasons why he was born with such physical and mental deficiencies. Some people stated that my mother and father were rapidly procreating in an attempt to build a family and because my mother's body was not recovering fast enough was one rationale. Others suggested that my parent's affinity for cigarettes and casual drinking caused a birth defect. A few people believed that my mother and father were often engaged in spousal arguing and fighting that it troubled her pregnancy and caused my brother to be born prematurely. Then, there were some who assumed that my mother had an affair with a relative and as a result of a moment of incest my brother was born with birth deficiencies.

These small town people had big-time opinions and everyone chimed in on the conversation of the physical deficiencies of my little brother. It was such a controversial issue that if my brothers and I overheard anyone speaking ill of our little brother that we would become immediately defensive and would launch out into physical rage to express our hurt from their comments and our massive love for our brother. We finally gripped the reality that we would not allow the opinions of other people to thwart the love we had for our brother. For our love surpassed any opinions that could come from anybody whether they were truthful or lies. Our reputation for defending our brother grew so rapidly that many people began to curve their opinions when we were in their presence because they knew the end result would not be pleasurable for them. There were even people in our family that turned their nose up at the life of our brother. Perhaps they had been persuaded by the opinions of others or perhaps they knew something about the situation that my brothers and I were too young to understand. In our youthful innocence, we made a real clear proclamation: regardless of the situation we truly love of our brother.

Despite the dreadful diagnosis that the doctors gave to my brother, he continued to live and found his loving place in the makeup of our family. I can remember when he was about two years old and he had grown some but not much and we were learning his behavior of happiness and pain as he had expressed them in different ways. There were two things that my brother could do despite all of his deficiencies to let us know how he was coping with life. When my brother was in pain he was able to ball up his fist and pound his head vigorously and the doctor suggested that this behavior would be normal for him because of the numerous surgeries that he had and the complications that he

would continue to suffer. Although he was very frail and skinny to the bones, when he would have seizures or moments of sharp pains in his head, we would either have to place a helmet on his head for protection or we would have to grab his fist and hold him tight enough to keep him from any self-inflicted harm. There were many moments and times in life when my brother would express the pain that he was feeling in his physical body. He had many surgeries, many seizures, and many instances where it seemed like life was getting ready to escape his fragile body. The other method in which my brother expressed himself was through laughter. It was the strangest thing because he would laugh at any given moment and at any given circumstance. His laughter was the center of our happiness and we determined that if my brother could laugh facing the physical challenges that he dealt with it, certainly the healthy bodied persons could laugh as our problems and challenges were minor in comparison to his challenges.

We experienced the laughter of my brother for the first time when he came home from spending many months in the hospital. While my mother was outside walking in the grass and no doubt praying that God would spare my brother's life, we were all circled around him on the couch, and out of nowhere my little brother burst out a laugh. As if it were yesterday, I distinctly remember running outside to my mother and yelling for her to come inside because our brother is laughing! I will never forget the terrified look on my mother's face when she turned towards me as if all that she had been praying for had been answered. My mother ran into the house, fell down on her knees in front of the couch, scattered my brothers away to make room for her presence, and found my little brother laughing with a huge smile on his face. My mother broke down in tears that day as she could not believe that the baby she had given birth to with so many defects and

deficiencies had developed character and personality, such as perseverance, that he had the audacity to laugh in the face of his circumstances. My mother began dancing and shouting and was calling my grandmother, uncles and aunties to come over and witness our little brother enjoying life. That moment has affixed an everlasting impression upon all of us, one that we will always cherish in the life of our baby brother.

With five sons being born to my father, understanding that one of those sons had severe physical challenges, many persons, especially men, would think that my father would be proud to have so many sons, but this was not the case. My father grew up in a two-parent home, had many siblings, and from my understanding was raised in a Christian environment. However, the pressures of being a father to five boys and the controversy of my baby brother caused a strain on the marriage between my mother and father. The first day that my brother was brought home to be received by my family would actually be the last time we would witness my father being in the home with us. I am uncertain if my mother and father relationship severed as they labored with my younger brother in the hospital or they had actually divorced sometime after. I do remember that my father was not in the home when we moved back from living with my grandmother. With all the excitement centered on my younger brother, it is difficult to recall if we even realized the absence of my father. When we questioned our mother about the presence of our father she never really gave us a clear and definite response. We questioned her often, and we continued to get the same response until our curiosity became sparse and we stopped asking our mother altogether. Our father resided in the same small town and we could find no justifiable reason as to why he was absent in our lives, especially in a time like this.

Actually, my memories of my father are not so pleasant at all. The memories that I have of him are painful, revengeful, hurtful, inexcusable and until recent, unforgivable. When I was about seven years old during the hot muggy heat of Arkansas, my mother and my brothers were sleeping on the floor in the living room under an old window air conditioner that required continuous adding of water to ensure that it would blow out cold air. On one of those nights while sleeping on the floor, it was very late and we were all in a deep sleep resting comfortably under the cold air. We were abruptly awakened when that air-conditioning unit was forced out of the window and landed within inches of us. We began to shout, scream and cry as we were totally unaware of what had occurred. To our surprise, we looked through the large hole in the window from which the air conditioner unit was installed and witnessed my father standing there fueled with anger and a very dangerous countenance. We did not realize it at the time, but had that heavy air-conditioning unit landed on any of us it could have caused serious bodily injury and quite possibly, death. My father did not enter into the premise of the home and I am led to believe that he left the scene when he witnessed our fear. I cannot recall the last time I saw him before this incident and my father decided to break his absenteeism and make his presence known in such a threatening manner. This was the first occasion that I saw my father behave violently, but it certainly was not the last.

A few weeks later my mother was up early getting prepared for work as most people in this small town found an occupation at a plant. For my mother, her place of work was the chicken plant. She had an old yellow Ford Pinto and it was a carbureted vehicle that needed to be warmed up before it could be driven. Around 6:00 a.m., I was roaming through the house, seeing my mother off as she was dressed in her blue jeans, a

heavy plaid sweater, and a wool cap, smoke was steaming out of her coffee mug and the old Ford Pinto was smoking as well. My mother got in the car and began to drive off to work, the rest of my brothers were still sleeping and I stood outside watching my mother drive down the street. To my surprise, I saw my father's brown 1980s model Chevy pickup truck burst from behind some trees and battle ram the side of my mother's car.

Given the massive weight and material makeup of that Chevy pickup truck pressed against the lightweight body of that Ford Pinto caused my mother and her car to tumble and roll until it landed on its roof. I stood there looking in a state of shock because I could not believe what I was witnessing. It seemed like a moment of eternity, and I snapped to it and ran as fast as I could to the aid of my mother. As I screamed and yelled the whole distance of perhaps ninety yards, neighbors had come out of the house and were pulling my mother out of the vehicle. I never made it all the way to the accident scene because someone standing near grabbed me and held me tightly reassuring me that my mother was all right. My grandmother had came out of the house, took me in her arms, and carried me back to her house where I remained until it was time for me to go to school. I never knew if my mother was aware that I witnessed this act of hatred and I do not recall ever sharing this experience with my brothers.

Time would not be far spent before another act of rage would be demonstrated by my father towards my mother. Living in such a small town did not come with all of the amenities of a larger city. Consequently, we had to go grocery shopping in a different city and to it was a very special and memorable moment because we actually were able to go out of town. My mother, brothers and I spent a whole Saturday morning grocery shopping at a store called Piggly Wiggly. We loaded up the hatchback of the vehicle and

began to make the twenty-minute trip back to town. We were so tempted to eat some of the groceries in the hatchback of the vehicle but we were reinforced by the voice of our mother that touching those groceries would lead to unwanted consequences. In the midst of our trip something caught the attention of my mother in her rearview mirror. It was actually the flashing headlights of my father in his Chevy pickup truck. My mother gasped for air as if she could foresee a dramatic episode waiting to unfold, and there was a total change in her attitude as she slowed the vehicle to a stop.

We pulled over into the driveway of someone's home off the side of the road. My mother told us to remain seated in the car, and as she exited the vehicle she stood in front of the car, arms folded, waiting for my father to approach her. My father got out of his truck and walked passed his sons crowded with groceries in the hatchback of my mother's vehicle, and began to immediately go into a rage of anger and threats towards my mother. We sat helplessly in the vehicle as my father grabbed my mother, roughed her up very badly, while attempting to drag her to his truck. The sound of my mother's voice screaming for help rings loudly in my ears today, and my father continued to physically abuse her in the presence of me and my brothers. When my mother had no more fight left in her, she laid helplessly on the ground at the rear of her vehicle. My brothers and I looked out the hatchback window of that car and we could see our mother wallowing there in her own blood and tears. We remained in the car and I do not believe it was because of our obedience, but because we were so frantic of what just occurred. Then the unimaginable happened. My father stepped into the vehicle and told us (me and my brothers) to sit down with a very threatening voice. My father cranked up the car, put it in reverse and backed the vehicle up to the street. I remembered being in that small

vehicle loaded with my brothers and groceries lifting as if we had rolled over a speed bump only to realize later that my father ran over my mother with her own vehicle. My father never thought once to determine how we were processing this horrific incident and proceeded to get in his own vehicle and drive off down the highway while my mother lay lifelessly in the driveway of strangers. A few moments later some neighbors came running out of their house to the aid of my mother and called the police. This turned out to be quite an experience as we were having a great time grocery shopping and yet our peace and tranquility had been abruptly interrupted by the violence of our father.

Besides all the tragedies and acts of crime that my father displayed toward my mother, it is difficult to remember a single time that he came to one of my birthday parties. My father never bought a football, a baseball and a glove, or a basketball to dribble on the concrete driveway of the projects we lived in. Honestly, even after the events of near-death experiences, in some longing and innate manner, I still longed for the presence of my father. Sometimes, I would come home from school in hopes that my father would be in the living room watching television, and without fail, day after day our father was not there. When I had sports activities in school as a very young boy I often looked in the stands hoping that my father would be there cheering me on as I dribbled the basketball to score a basket or carry the football across the touchdown line or came in first place at a track meet, but my father was not there.

I do remember a constant father figure throughout the let downs of my father's absenteeism, and that was my uncle. Most of what I learned as a young male child came from the teachings of him. Those days when I did not have the strength or tenacity to lift my head after being disappointed by my father, my uncle was always there, silently

absorbing my bitter experiences. In his own way, my uncle felt obligated as my mother's brother to fill the gap for us five boys, and he did so with an everlasting impression of gratitude and thanksgiving. Despite the good deeds of my uncle, the absenteeism of my father began to formulate the idea in my development that this was normal practice for a typical family to experience. I was the child that never really wanted any type of material gain from my father, just his presence, love and support. No matter how much I longed for the attention of my father I never received it in a positive way.

Now being a father myself coupled with the personal experiences of being the product of an absentee father, my vow to my children is to be a very present, active and engaged father in their lives as long as there is breath in my body. Despite my father's absence, he actually taught me the significance and lifelong impact that fatherhood will have on its offspring. His absence created the urge for me to never abandon my children so they are to never experience the gravity of pain incurred in my own childhood experiences. One of the most precious moments that will be forever cherished in my heart is the day my children publicly gave me a shirt with their painted handprints on it that read "World's Greatest Dad." While this is not my testimony of my biological father, it is relieving to know that this cycle of absenteeism has been broken and my children will not endure the pains of an absentee father.

My ministry at the church as Senior Pastor, and spreading into the community, has merged my personal testimony with the ailments of many young men. I am becoming a spiritual and adopted father to young men who have been abandoned by their biological fathers. Without making a public statement or producing an advertisement, my ministry has rapidly magnetized young, fatherless men, who feel a gravitational pull in my

direction. These young men see something in me that could bring healing to their oppressing situation, and once again finding myself in a crux where people see things in me that I am slow to see myself. When I minister to these young men, their experiences are so similar to my own that I gasp for air and foresee the anguish and confusion they will inevitably experience as a result of their reality. My sermons and Bible study lessons have shifted these last few years that embrace wholeness, predestination, being healed, forgiving, and walking in your purpose. When I meet with neighboring pastors, I am intrigued by conversations of rescuing our youth, developing mentorship programs, and partnering with the public schools and parents. As a pastor, I have set aside a special budget of the church that specifically will be used to help minister to our youth, especially those who are experiencing an absentee father. My prayers are incomplete without uplifting those who feel lost and unloved by a father, and my sermons often reassure my listeners that God parents us all.

There is an innate drive in me to father those who are fatherless because I recovered from my absentee father with the help of the Lord and the aid of some good men in my life. I wonder sometimes how my life would be, as a husband and a father, if my biological father had a more positive role in my life. Other times I wonder what my life would be like if I did not have some good men in my life to help me become a better man. In either case, I believe that my experiences in life molded and shaped me to minister to others in similar situations. As my uncle, stepfathers, and pastors prophesied to me that I would become something greater than my current experiences, I want to be that prophetic and inspirational voice that transforms a life that sets others on the course of liberation and perpetual ministry. There are young men, particularly African-

Americans, all over this world who feel lost, incomplete, abandoned, unwanted, abused, unloved and misunderstood as a result of the side effects of an absentee father. I believe a major component of my ministry, given my familiarity with an absentee father, is the urgency to reach that particular group and help them embrace the greatness and unlocked potential that God has placed in them.

Contextual Analysis

Inspired by a vision to introduce Christ to an un-churched people and compelled to bring faith to the community, Rev. J.H. Welborne founded the Moses Missionary Baptist Church, which has engaged in continuous ministry since its first service on February 21st, 1907. Starting with only eight members, church services were conducted in the Hattie McCollough Hall until the financial stewardship of the church enabled the members to purchase the property. New converts to the faith were baptized in the Savannah River which is walking distance from the church, and fortunately, the members were able to acquire its own outdoor pool in 1920. In 1922, the Rev. J.H. Welborne was called to eternal glory after fifteen years of leadership, and his body is the only remains buried on the church property, and continues to be a memorial in the present day.

The church is located in the oldest neighborhood of Augusta, Georgia, known as Olde Town. With a rich history dating back as far as the early 1700's, Augusta is the second largest city in the state of Georgia, and has its population of nearly 200,000 residents. A fundamental location throughout the Civil and Revolutionary Wars, several prominent and influential persons in politics have roots from Augusta, to include Woodrow Wilson, the twenty-eighth President of the United States, and George Walton,

a signer of the Declaration of Independence. Augusta remains a city that is predominately populated by two ethnicities, African-Americans and Whites, respectively. As the second largest inland cotton producers in the world during the cotton boom, many neighborhoods in the city of Augusta boast the word “Plantation” in its title, and often humble persons as a reminder of the gruesome reality of slavery. As a result of Augusta’s historically deep involvement in servitude, the division between ethnicities and the aroma of prejudice and racism continues to hover in the atmosphere.

The Olde Town neighborhood of Augusta is located in the eastern downtown area of the city, which began as a wealthy, White working class community. Located just a few blocks from the South Carolina border, Olde Town rapidly grew in population and prosperity, and housed some of Augusta’s most precious monuments, to include the city jail and the city’s largest and oldest graveyard. Over the years, the community became diversified, and today, more African Americans reside in the Olde Town neighborhood than Whites. The community has transitioned from prosperity and wealth to one of Augusta’s most poverty-stricken, high crime and drug activity neighborhoods in the city. There are many dilapidated homes, destitute residents, and streets littered with illegal activities. The church is nestled on one of the highest traffic streets in the neighborhood, which has its benefits and challenges as a result of its location. Through the freewill donation of the Knox Foundation, an organization that owns an abundance of property throughout Augusta, the church inherited several plots of land in Olde Town.

The current physical building of the Moses Baptist Church was erected in 1982 to comfortably seat 350 persons after the membership experienced numerical growth. The church is outfitted with offices and restrooms downstairs, and several offices and

classrooms upstairs. A fellowship hall is located in the rear of the church that will accommodate one hundred persons, with a kitchen just large enough to serve the needs of the members. The church parking lot will host twenty-five cars, leaving other members and visitors to circle the property with their vehicles, or park in one of the vacant lots owned by the church. The front entry vestibule treasures large, framed photographs of the historical pastors of the church, flanked by notable members who contributed to the success and sustainability of the church. After thirty years of continuous high foot traffic, the physical building of the church has been well maintained and preserved.

Socially, the church has often fellowshipped with sister Baptist churches in the city, and has done so over the lifespan of the church. The church has never fellowshipped with a denomination that was non-Baptist affiliated. During a time when the church was making several pastoral transitions and key leadership changes, many members relocated to the sister Baptist churches that seemed more settled and organized, causing the church to suffer in a loss of membership. Consequently, the church also experienced a year of several deaths of older, influential members that were patriarchs and matriarchs of large families, resulting in another huge loss of membership. Maintaining its faith and integrity, the church continued to have services each week with a dwindled membership, a broken spirit, and concerns for the future of the church.

Culturally, the church holds fast to the King James Version of the Bible, although newer members and the pastor are helping to welcome other translations. The Church Covenant is read aloud by the congregants once a month and the Articles of Faith are taught in every New Members Orientation. Each Sunday morning, all members are led through the reading of the 23rd Psalms, followed by a unified recital of the Lord's Prayer.

Its worship style ranges from traditional to contemporary, with hymnals and old Gospel classics having the most spiritual impact on worship. The seasoned, long termed members of the church retain a sentimental value of historical accomplishments and often recall the contributions of the deceased members who were significant in its achievements. Although the church has experienced exponential growth, the congregation remains a closely knitted community of believers, and has a keen sense of the importance of family.

The senior generation of the church tends to be more active, engaged and participatory than any other age group. The veteran and baby Boomer generations are leaders and officers in several ministries, and retain much of the responsibility and operations of the church. Twenty-five percent of the congregants are sixty-five years and older, but the expected lifespan of the members has averaged ninety years old. With an abundance of new births in the church, the future looks promising for membership. The Mother of the church is currently one hundred and two years old, with a Mothers Board whose ages follow closely behind. The female gender membership of the church is very active and engaged throughout all age groups. Many women serve in leadership capacities and have carried the church through some of its most difficult times. However, the male gender membership of the church continues to be a challenge. The average age of the Deacons Board is seventy-five years old, and recruiting more males to serve as deacons is one of the greatest impediments. Since the church is traditional in its fundamental Baptist beliefs and doctrines, only men at the present time are allowed to serve as deacons.

The ethnicity of the church is African-American, and the household income ranges from poverty to upper middle class. The city of Augusta offers a limited employment industry for financial prosperity, which includes educators, the field of medicine and science, and military. As a result of the limited job opportunities in the city, and the lack of education and expertise within the membership, the church has faced financial difficulties since its conception. Until 2010, the congregants where never taught to tithe their incomes. Paying monthly dues and various forms of fundraising generated the primary source of financial security. The banking accounts of the church had very little balances for an entity over one hundred years old, and ninety percent of funds received were spent to maintain the basic operations and functionality of the church. With the recent teachings of tithing, sacrificial offerings and financial stewardship, the church has witnessed a forty percent increase in giving for two consecutive years. The church has relinquished all debts of its properties, to include the external plots of land in the community, the church van, and the internal equipment used for day-to-day operations. In 2011, a unified decision was made that the church would partner with four other sister churches and launch its own federal credit union. Since a stronghold of poverty, debt, and bad credit arrested a large portion of the membership, it was incumbent that teaching and preaching on financial liberation and stewardship combated those negative forces, and now the church is well on its way towards fiscal security. As a result of tithing and financial discipline, the church was able to completely remodel its main sanctuary with new paint, refurbished furniture, new carpet, and a state of the art video and production system.

The mentality of the church is diversified by its five generational genetics. The Builders generation often wondered if their faithful prayers for a sustained ministry would be answered, and today, are excited to witness all the growth and functionalities of the church. At the core of the Builders generation is family and church, and these members live in awe each day, are awakened each morning with hope, and are inspired to attend every worship opportunity offered by the church. Unable to labor in the church to equate their desires, the Builder generation is the most faithful in attendance at worship services, the most influential persons to their family members, and is the greatest financial contributors of the church.

The Boomer generation of the church enjoys family and education, and most of the educators in the congregation are stemmed from this group. Their mentality is leadership influence as they attempt to groom their replacements in many capacities. This generation carries many responsibilities in the church, are hard workers with a sense of ownership, and their spouses are often engaged as well. Their financial contributions are second to the Builders, but are increasing as their children and grandchildren mature.

The Buster generation hosts many single parents, primarily women, each with multiple children. The men in this group are scarce, uncommitted, and attend worship services on an irregular basis. The women in this group are in abundance, overly committed with their children's extracurricular activities, work related responsibilities, social club commitments, educational endeavors, and a conviction to serve in some capacity at the church. The overall commitment to attendance and participation in the church is unbalanced, and their financial contributions are very minimal due to their desire to live beyond their means.

The Bridgers generation represents twenty-five percent of the congregation's population, and is the greatest perpetual concern of the church. Although several youth in the church function well in the public and private sectors of life, many face challenges of teenage pregnancy, male juvenile delinquency, high school dropouts, low self-esteem, and are facing domestic violence issues in the homes. Gender wise, the young ladies excel in school, tend to be well mannered, and are easily redirected when facing disciplinary concerns. The young men, however, are the greatest trepidation mainly because they lack discipline, have little to no positive male influence in their life, and do not see the value of a quality education. Several young men in the church have been suspended from school, for reasons of fighting, drug paraphernalia, or carrying weapons, and others have been incarcerated in a youth detention center. Within the last two years, three young men were the victims of a violent crime resulting in death. All generations of the church focus their prayers, efforts, and support of saving the young men in the Bridgers generation. Their parents and grandparents give due diligence to ensuring their children are active in church, and the church offers more ministry activities to this group than any other generation. Overall, the Bridgers do not contribute to the financial security of the church, and their parents are not the best influencers of giving.

Intrinsically, the church has great potential to have a significant impact on its members, community and city. Common threads that are interwoven in the fabric and essence of the church are love, a desire to learn, and a willing heart of stewardship. The church has been receptive to new leadership, and has welcomed many new ideas and implementations that have cultivated growth in every aspect of the health of the church. With a severe decline in membership for many years, the church has successfully

witnessed an exponential growth spurt that exceeds three hundred members. Over the last two years, each consecutive year has yielded one hundred new members to the church, and has averaged fifty-five or more baptisms. The church recently adopted a high crime, drug infested apartment complex to focus its ministry efforts and introduce an unsaved people to Christ. The community residents who are homeowners are appreciative and supportive of the improvement measures the church has taken to help rebuild the neighborhood. Several sister churches in the community have offered and partnered their efforts with the church to propel the success of saturation evangelism. As one of the fastest growing churches in the city, many Augustans are keeping a watchful, yet optimistic eye on the church, and are resting their hopes that the church will be able to save a community of people that plague the city with crime.

Sound, doctrinal, and fundamental biblical preaching and teaching, coupled with a diverse and dynamic music ministry, has inspired over eighty persons to visit our worship service consecutively for the last two years. With a musical ensemble of five choirs and praise and worship teams, several gifted musicians, and spirit-led vocalists, the church often experiences a charismatic form of worship. Traditionally, the spirit of praise and worship was very conservative, monotone, and bland. The singing of hymnals each Sunday morning began to lose its fervor, and the preaching was disconnected from the ailments and realities of the membership. Many members considered church to be a burden, and either forced themselves to attend services or would be inconsistent in their attendance. Within the last two years, the music ministry was completely revitalized, a praise and worship team was instituted, and a new delivery style of preaching was introduced to the congregation. Those same members that struggled with irregular

attendance to worship services now testify that they resent missing services, and only do so in extreme situations. The audio and video production ministry provides copies of the weekly services in several formats, and the members support this ministry extremely well. The production ministry has shared with the church that recorded media from the weekly services has reached all over the United States and has ventured in many different countries. Since the worship services have gravitated towards a more charismatic form of worship, and the members are embracing a full understanding of God's Word, attending on a regular basis, and supportive of the ministry endeavors, there is now a need for an additional worship service on Sunday mornings.

The Moses Missionary Baptist Church has a promising future. Plans have recently been launched to erect a new resource center that will house all the offices of the church, additional classrooms, a new kitchen and dining hall, a choir rehearsal room, and many other necessities to accommodate the needs of the membership and the community. The resource center will be used to offer GED classes, welfare to work programs, a daycare center, resume and job interview workshops, and many other enriching classes to educate persons towards self-sufficiency. Older members are giving more of their resources now than ever before, and our joint prayers are for the younger generation, primarily, the African-American males. As the church continue to grow at a phenomenal rate, our faith remains rooted in the God-given mission and vision of the church. As a vision statement, we aspire to "Transform All Generations Through the Word of God." Our mission statement is to "Evangelize, Educate, Equip, Empower and Edify," and our goal statement is to "Produce Ambassadors for Christ." The church has adopted a theme that identifies our faith, corporate prayers and efforts, which is to "Watch God Work!" This

statement is embodied on paraphernalia made available by the church, and the members have taken ownership of the newfound theme. For a church that has experienced a prosperous and problematic past, its future is promising, powerful and predestined for prominence!

Synergy

A perpetual epidemic that is plaguing the African-American culture in the Twenty-First Century are absentee fathers that neglect their parental responsibilities and negatively contribute to a spiraling statistic of single parent homes. The common side effects of an African-American absentee father are manifested in detrimental behaviors that often impair those directly affected, consequently, the mother and the children. Indirectly, an entire community, the local church, and the United States government have felt the careless impact of absenteeism in the African-American culture. Communities that are concerned with the African-American dilemma have launched programs and campaign initiatives that are insoluble to the challenges it faces. Predominate African-American churches who share this concern with their parishioners have developed men's ministries aimed at rectifying fatherly absenteeism that have lost its fervor in addressing the concrete issues that is seemingly birth and stemmed from its male members of the church. The United States government have inadvertently rewarded absenteeism by providing single mothers with overcompensated welfare benefits, subsidized housing in poverty-stricken conditions, a mandate that threatens the loss of benefits should a man be discovered in the home, and no real exit strategy to be delivered from assistance and dependability upon the government. Most initiatives launched by communities, local

churches, and the government to resolve absenteeism in the African-American culture has superficially missed the target, resulting in bandaging a wound that obviously requires surgery. Surface tactics have failed miserably because the focus for decades have been reactive measures that consume most of the resources and efforts, thwarting real soluble initiatives from diagnosing the root cause of the problem. Evidently, absenteeism in the African-American culture is greater than the finite fickleness of mere human capabilities, and has become a God-sized assignment that obligates researchers and concerned persons to revisit the core of creation and theology.

The African-American family dynamics are complex given its historical triumphs and tribulations, and consequently, the problems it faces are equally complex in discovering a working solution. Revisiting the core of creation and theology as it relates to the African-American culture, statistics have proven that the biblical terminology and definition for marriage has lost its significance and is shuffled away and replaced with common law marriage or mutual dwelling. Dr. Clarence Walker, author of *Breaking Strongholds in the African American Family* states “Many men grow up in fatherless homes and do not know who or even where their fathers are. They often are raised in homes where they feel rejected, neglected, and abandoned by their fathers. Experiencing rejection himself damages a man’s ability to be close to someone.”¹ When young males grow up in such environments that do not address the painstaking reality that their father is absent in the home, or dismiss the significance of at least having the father participate in the child’s life, the young male grows up with varying psychological behaviors that typically formulates inaccurate reasons for the absence of the father. Commonly, these

¹ Clarence Walker, *Breaking Strongholds in the African American Family: Strategies for Spiritual Warfare* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996), 28.

ideals develop the next generation of fathers who never resolved their own misguided emotions and experiences of dealing with absenteeism. Inadvertently, these young men procreate and become poor examples to their offspring and recreate an exact replica of the reality they experienced as adolescents in a fatherless home. In light of this tragedy, absenteeism births absenteeism because many children in the African-American community are reared in fatherless homes. Although absenteeism does not have to be the perpetual cycle, in most cases, a fatherless home with young males normally results in repeated behavior.

Breaking this stronghold that distresses the African-American culture requires more than an initiative, ministry effort, or government assistance. Although many of the problems and challenges these institutions face are unprecedented, their primary function, as in the past, is to show, in word and deed, how God is at work in the world. To meet this mandate, black churches must constantly redefine and reform themselves and their ministries. Otherwise, they will become pathetic anachronisms in a world that changes daily. The antidote for this poisonous fortress requires a definitive model prescribing the requirements to be an engaged and present father that transforms generational curses into generational blessings. There is no annihilating the personal experience and the ailment of being reared in a fatherless home having minimal interaction with my biological father. Being the second of five sons with an absentee father, there remains an understanding of the diverse emotions, un-raised and unanswered questions, and how challenging it can be for a young male to mature into adulthood and face parental concerns with fears of failing because of his abundance of exposure and experience with absenteeism as an adolescent.

In my context in ministry, alarming statistics have revealed a truth that contributes to the challenges of absenteeism in the African-American community. After conducting a brief consensus and survey in the church, it was discovered that in a congregation of over three hundred actively engaged members, that the ratio of women to men is three to one. This data concludes that for every one adult male in the church, there are at least three adult females. When observing the adult women in the church that have school-aged children, including those traditionally college-bound students, it was determined that over ninety percent of those adult women were not married, and nearly seventy percent complained of absentee biological fathers. Additionally, the observations recorded that nearly all the single mothers in the church had more than one child, and sixty-six percent of active children and youth in the church are males. Given these statistics, it was concluded that more males are born into a perpetual cycle of absentee fathers in the home, leaving single mothers to rear more and more male children without the consistent participation of their biological fathers. Most of the women surveyed attested that they would aspire for a mature, responsible man to help them specifically groom their male children. The overall theme of this analysis stemmed from the reality that the single parent mothers in the church were experiencing extreme difficulty in training, disciplining and retaining the attention and respect from their male children. Therefore, the church is in dire need of a viable, soluble ministry model that addresses absenteeism from a reactive approach given its current position, yet a preparatory supposition that embodies a proactive methodology that changes the culture of absenteeism in the African-American family.

There have been numerous instances in my personal life of the desire to have a consistent, male role model that would teach me the ways of the Lord from a male perspective. Not that the theological framework or foundational teaching was altered from my mother's perspective, but the innate drive to want attention and leadership from a strong male figure. There were many times where compliments were given to my mother on being a strong Black woman, but felt incomplete and isolated from a greater purpose internally because no justifiable reason could be given to excuse the absenteeism of my father. During my adolescent years, along with my four brothers, a plethora of conversations erupted spontaneously entailing the loneliness and un-forgiveness that followed the consequences of my father's absenteeism. With this experience and dreadful emotions, a correlation can be related to the sixty-six percent of adolescent males in the church who are feeling the same appalling, sentiments towards their absentee fathers.

The residual effect of an absentee father in the African-American culture has greatly challenged the Black Church, its communities, social status, emotional stability, financial security, spiritual balance, and physical demands for a positive, male presence. "However, neither males nor females will ever be fully actualized if the crisis of the male is not addressed, since men have a primary influence on the tone and direction of society."² The core of fatherly absenteeism in the African-American culture rests within men understanding their purpose and their power. When the influence of the male is used according to the will of God, then family structure and dynamics can be restored and secured faithfully. When this influence is misunderstood or abused, then we will continue to face the challenges of a structure that is failing increasingly among each generation.

² Myles Munroe, *Understanding the Purpose and Power of Men* (New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 2001), 14.

From an historical standpoint, fatherly absenteeism in the African American communities has been an epidemic since the tragedy of slavery. With mass slave trade and human trafficking, slavery caused the widest range of division in the African-American society by removing men from their roles as husband and fathers and psychologically damaging their perspective of the role of the male in the family. "For black men and women, slavery was an equally devastating experience. Both were torn from homeland and family. Both were forced to perform grueling labor, subjected to mental and physical degradation, and denied their most basic rights."³ The side effects of slavery as it relates to fatherly absenteeism has impaired the African-American communities and research continues to make strides in restoring the balance within this specific ethnic group. Although the statistical rates of fatherly absenteeism in the African-American community are disturbing and alarming, its eruption of mass proportions gave visible evidence in the mid 1900's. In such a short time, fatherly absenteeism in the African-American culture has spiraled to epidemic proportions that has completely shocked and affected all cultures in the American society.

Fatherly absenteeism in the African-American community has not always been an historical concern. Evidence has been suggested that Africans in their native lands and cultures valued the family dynamics, and males were expected to father their homes and were very well respected leaders in their communities. These providers and protectors of their villages valued their responsibilities and established a system that perpetuated a cycle of men who would preserve the legacies of fatherhood. When other ethnic groups and countries found it profitable to oppress free Africans and force them to become

³ Production of Thirteen/WNET, *Slavery and the Making of America* (New York: Educational Broadcasting Corporation, 2004).

slaves, the interruption of their stability was forever altered, and the current society in America has evolved into an ailment that challenges African-American males to redefine their identities and establish a foundation that has been historically robbed from their heritage. The greatest challenge in overcoming the historical root of fatherly absenteeism in the African-American community is redeeming a time that encompasses a vision when fatherly absenteeism was not an epidemic, and the culture respected and expected men to be great husbands, fathers, leaders, and protectors of their communities.

The Bible has given evidence of fatherly absenteeism and how these behaviors have negatively affected the faith community. Both Old and New Testament scriptures have provided support that fatherly absenteeism has long-enduring consequences that hinders the positive progression of its descendants and future generations. The Bible has provided these realities as examples to its readers and believers to assist in reducing the problem of fatherly absenteeism and definitely not condoning or supporting fatherly absenteeism from a biblical bearing.

Abraham as a father neglected to embrace Ishmael because of the disturbance that erupted between Hagar, the mother of Ishmael and Sarah, Abraham's primary wife. Avoiding the quarrel between the two women, Abraham succumbs to the demands of his wife Sarah, resulting in Hagar and Ishmael's exile from Abraham's lordship. With the banishment of Hagar and her son Ishmael, Abraham would abandon a young male adolescent who was innocent in the affairs of his conception and would prove that he desperately needed the guidance of a righteous father. Abraham demonstrates to the African-American community today that even if the relationships between the parents dissolve that the fathers should remain obligated to the parenting of their children.

Abraham's neglect produced a son who would find his own identity, and the result of Ishmael's discovery of himself differed greatly from the identity of his father. Biblically, Isaac, the second son of Abraham and first with Sarah, found his identity as a man, father, and husband greatly because Abraham did not abandoned Isaac as an absentee father like he did Ishmael.

Fatherly absenteeism in the African-American community is one of the strongest dangers of misfortune, and therefore necessitates a strong, theological perspective to help eradicate this behavior that has plagued this country. Since fatherly absenteeism in the African-American culture wrestles with the psychological, emotional, financial, judicial, social, and spiritual components of the African-American male, there must be liberation from any forces that are negatively hindering deliverance for these males to return to their proper positions in life. Black liberation theology, greatly influenced by Dr. James H. Cone, addresses the need for deliverance from oppression that has troubled the African-American community for decades. The ideal of this liberation theology gives African-Americans the visual to see God through the lens of their oppression, and to help encourage believers that God is both sensitive and on the side of those who are oppressed. Since slavery injected a majority of oppressive practices into the livelihood and fabric of the African-American communities, black liberation theology repels those oppressive behaviors that have lingered from an historical past of slavery while simultaneously hindering a reinvention of new forms of slavery and oppression in the African-American society. "The person who cooperates in individual or institutional injustice seeks to dehumanize the victim and black liberation theology is a reverb of this

theological perspective.”⁴ Fatherly absenteeism in the African-American community must be addressed from a theological outlook that proves that God has included in the plan of salvation the prosperity and preservation of the African-American people and from a theological view permits African-Americans to identify with God as their Creator and Liberator. Slavery and its enduring mental fallacies in the African-American communities have aided in fatherly absenteeism and black liberation theology is the theological antidote to medicate those fallacies.

Fatherly absenteeism in the African-American community has a theoretical value that has been identified in many concentric circles that share in eradicating this concern. Although the impairment of fatherly absenteeism is heavily populated in the African-American community, the influence of this contagious problem is interwoven into all branches of the Twenty First Century society. Sociologists, economists, psychologists, and many other researchers and scholars have shared in their theories the cause and effect of fatherly absenteeism in the African-American community. The commonality that is universal in theory is the belief that fatherly absenteeism stemmed from the effects of slavery and continues to permeate the mentality of millions of fathers, both active and inactive, in the African-American community. With much agreement to the birth of fatherly absenteeism, theories are still developing as to the continuation of this matter, and how to address the concern in such an impactful way that produces a positive protection against the perpetuation of fatherly absenteeism in the African-American culture.

⁴ Gardner C. Taylor, *The Words of Gardner C. Taylor, Compiled by Edward L. Taylor in “Goals of Social Change”* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2002), 189.

African-American fatherly absenteeism is an historical dilemma that mandates a theological liberation based upon biblical truths that will guide its theoretical outcomes. African-American fathers who neglect their responsibilities as fathers are not solely at fault for their psychological and spiritual struggles that has been embedded in those men from a residual effect of slavery. Given the inspiration of Scripture, and biblical evidence of men who faltered in fatherhood, African-American males can find relief and assurance that God will restore them as men and fathers should these men seek empowerment from God. From the African-American male perspective, the biblical components that address this epidemic necessitate a theological viewpoint that liberates African-American males from an African-American evaluation of theology. Researchers cannot expect emancipation of fatherly absenteeism in the African-American culture that teaches liberation from a predominately White perspective and understanding. This methodology would be erroneous and counteractive in the liberation of African-American fathers because it conflicts with the existing resistance and receptivity of liberation from an ethnicity that predominately is responsible for the need of liberation. For a theoretical outcome to be beneficial in reducing the alarming statistical rates of fatherly absenteeism in the African-American communities, the truth of the historical events of slavery must be owned and acknowledged as a starting point for the absenteeism in the Twenty-First Century, and the biblical applications must correlate from a theological scope that liberates African-Americans. When the historical affairs, biblical examples, theological liberation, and theoretical applications align in a synergistic manner, fatherly absenteeism may have a practical solution to alter its current course of demise and begin to restore African-American males to their respective positions and vocations as active fathers.

CHAPTER TWO

BIBLICAL FOUNDATION

There are no patriarchal figures in all the Old Testament writings, and arguably the entire collection of scripture, that was more faithful to God and blessed for his obedience than Abraham, the son of Terah. With demonstrable devotion in his worship and loyalty, an uncompromising understanding of God's promises, and a tenacious trust in the unsearchable riches of God's glory, Abraham is widely believed to be the father of faith, and is the first mention of those who remained faithful to God in Hebrews 13.

Undeniably faithful to his God, as with all the great patriarchs of the Old Testament, Abraham contained a character flaw that has caused contention and controversy for thousands of years. The gruesome reality of one challenging decision has proven to be the unnerving blemish of Abraham's legacy. Through the lens of Abraham's decision-making influenced by external factors and pressures, demonstrates to an awaiting world just how great an individual can be on one end of the spectrum yet falter and fail under scrutiny and silence on the other side of the spectrum. Abraham's course of action also proves the consequences of a forced decision and the longevity of those consequences from one act of disobedience. Abraham's decision, of the many that he made in obedience to God, challenged every aspect of his humanity, but nothing more than his fatherhood. Voluntarily or reluctantly, Abraham was not only the father of faith, but also

an absentee father. Through Abraham's life decisions and challenges, one perhaps can better understand how great a man can be in one area of his life yet struggle and fall short in other areas of life. Abraham's absenteeism unfolds some mystical revelations that will positively assist in the foundations of fatherly absenteeism and perhaps provoking thought processes to help remedy this modern day epidemic.

Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee: And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed. So Abram departed, as the LORD had spoken unto him; and Lot went with him: and Abram was seventy and five years old when he departed out of Haran. And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their substance that they had gathered, and the souls that they had gotten in Haran; and they went forth to go into the land of Canaan; and into the land of Canaan they came, (Genesis 12:1-5).¹

According to Genesis 12, God challenged Abraham to leave all that he was accustomed to and follow God into unknown territory. Formerly reared under pagan influence, Abraham answers the clarion call of God with clarity, and without hesitation, begins the process of relocating to a new promised land. Being faithful and obedient, Abraham sojourns into unfamiliar territory of land in the physical sense while dually journeying into an unfamiliar territory of faith in the spiritual sense. Travelling with his wife Sarah, his nephew Lot, and his belongings or inheritance, this would be Abraham's first demonstrable act of obedience to God. Facing some challenges along the way, the providential hand of God favored Abraham's transitions, and allowed him to settle into a new homestead and lifestyle that reflected a relationship and trust in God. Prior to departure, God assured Abraham of greatness as a reward for his obedience, and embedded within that covenant agreement was the assurance of fatherhood because at the

¹ Biblical Citation within the document is from the King James Version unless otherwise noted, Genesis 12:1-5.

time Abraham had no descendants. Abraham was approximately seventy-five years old when he heard the promises of God, and those conversations of fatherhood intensified some years later when the hopes and aspirations of potentially becoming a father seemed dismal.

It was a serious matter for a man to be childless in the ancient world, for it left him without an heir. But it was even more calamitous for a woman: to have a great brood of children was a mark of success as a wife; to have none was ignominious failure. So throughout the ancient East polygamy was resorted to as a means of obviating childlessness. But wealthier wives preferred the practice of surrogate motherhood... This practice of surrogate motherhood is attested throughout the ancient Orient from the third to the first millennium B.C., from Babylon to Egypt... Given the social mores of the ancient Near East, Sarai's suggestion was a perfectly proper and respectable course of action.²

Sensing her husband's anguish and perhaps taking on the burden of feeling barren, Sarah suggests to Abraham ten years after relocating that he should conceive a child with the handmaid Hagar. With low patience, recognizing an expiration of biological time, Abraham considers and consents to his wife's suggestion, and marries Hagar.

Now Sarai Abram's wife bare him no children: and she had an handmaid, an Egyptian, whose name was Hagar. And Sarai said unto Abram, Behold now, the LORD hath restrained me from bearing: I pray thee, go in unto my maid; it may be that I may obtain children by her. And Abram hearkened to the voice of Sarai. And Sarai Abram's wife took Hagar her maid the Egyptian, after Abram had dwelt ten years in the land of Canaan, and gave her to her husband Abram to be his wife. And he went in unto Hagar, and she conceived: and when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress was despised in her eyes. And Sarai said unto Abram, My wrong be upon thee: I have given my maid into thy bosom; and when she saw that she had conceived, I was despised in her eyes: the LORD judge between me and thee (Genesis 16:1-5).

Despite the numerous reassurances of God that Abraham would conceive a child with Sarah, impulsiveness and irresponsibility governs Abraham's decision in the favor of his

² Gordon J. Wenham, *Word Biblical Commentary* (Waco, TX: Word, 1994), 7.

wife. According to the customary laws and traditions of that time, Abraham's decision to marry Hagar was not unlawful, and all involved parties, Abraham, Sarah and Hagar, understood this principle.

Factually, Sarah was the primary consenting party and permitted the marriage between Abraham and Hagar by submitting her handmaid to her husband Abraham. However, the flaw in Abraham's decision was the haste to surrender to impatience and the ill advisement of his wife rather than remain faithful to his God that gave him the promise. Perhaps fatherly absenteeism through Abraham's experience is stemmed from bad judgment and surrendering to ungodly advisement that complicates both the immediate and futuristic contexts of the involved parties. The foundation of Sarah's hasty decision for Abraham to marry and conceive a son with Hagar was the tiring and waiting exhaustion of her husband. However, Abraham's foundations, despite the exhaustive efforts of his wife Sarah, should have remained rooted in the promises of God. Hagar was not the covenant partner of Abraham and neither was she the chosen vessel to bring forth the promised seed of Abraham. With haste, Abraham attempts to speed up God's agenda for his own life, and in doing so, makes a dreadful mistake that complicated his fatherhood experience.

Abraham's experience unfolds yet another disturbing component that leads to fatherly absenteeism. Although his wife Sarah suggested that Abraham conceive a child with the handmaid Hagar, strife, envy, and jealousy erupted between the two women that ultimately forced Abraham to make a critical decision. Abraham's silence in the disputing of the two women is typical of fathers today who have multiple mothers of their children who often engage in argumentative conversations. Hagar felt a sense of

empowerment since she was able to give Abraham what Sarah could not. Until the marriage of Abraham and Hagar, Sarah reported no acts of disrespect and disobedience from her handmaid. However, once Hagar knew that she was carrying Abraham's seed, and her anatomical composition reflected the evidence of pregnancy, Hagar's demeanor and behavior drastically changed towards Sarah. The text does not give us specific details of the conversations and interactions between the two women, but those sessions and experiences must have been severe considering the harsh outcome of Hagar's punishment from Sarah. "The ancient codes are relevant to explain the conventions that Sarah and Hagar followed. Since there were clear legal standards, Hagar breached them by asserting freedom, and Sarah acted within her rights to reassert Hagar's servitude."³ The text suggests in Genesis 16 that Sarah acknowledges her poor decision to give her handmaid to Abraham as she was experiencing the repercussions of her decision. However, verse six is the disturbing response and behavior from Abraham that further complicates a very sensitive situation. Abraham's response focuses on the immediate characters in the dramatic scene, but falls short of considering the main character and matter of importance, which is the child. Hagar was chosen to bring forth a male child for Abraham, and instead of focusing on the main issue at hand Hagar begins to use her unborn son as a weapon of assault against Sarah.

When Sarah recognizes her error and is shamed for not being able to fulfill her husband's desire, she pleads with her husband to handle the matter with Hagar. As the man and father, Abraham was voiceless in the affairs and disputes of the women in his life.

³ Hayyim Angel, *Jewish Bible Quarterly*, 41 no 4 O-D 2013, 211-218. Publication Type: Article, Database: ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials.

Sarah, apparently fearing that Hagar and Ishmael will contrive to rob Isaac of his primogeniture, orders them banished. Spurred on by a word of divine intervention, a displeased Abraham complies. Hagar and Ishmael depart, woefully under-provisioned, and they escape death in the desert only when God intervenes. Hagar thus has the misfortune to be the victim of all sorts of malfeasance, neglect, and even inhumanity: Sarah envies her and despises her son, while Abraham stands waffling in the wings, eventually condemning his concubine to exile and, quite possibly, death.⁴

Hagar was able to give Abraham what Sarah ostensibly could not provide, a male child. Sarah was his wife, helpmeet, Abraham's lifelong partner and she desired to please her husband. Sarah was everything to Abraham a wife could be, but according to God's divine plan, she was not able to give Abraham a son until God's permitted time. In many instances as such, men have lifelong partners whose primary desire is to love and please their husbands. However, many may falter in one area or aspect, and that one component overly complicates the relationship and introduces another woman who can perform in the area where the wife may be deficit. When this occurs, as in the case with the women of Abraham, a strain is forced on the relationship, and the women begin an assault on each other and use their offspring as collateral to force their agenda. Hagar was in error for disrespecting her mistress Sarah, and should have considered herself honored to have been chosen for this blessing.

When Sarah repents to her husband Abraham for her decision to allow Hagar to be Abraham's wife, Abraham in return permits Sarah to resolve the situation. Honing in closely on the text, Sarah has approached Abraham as her husband and authoritative figure to remedy the out of control affairs between Sarah and Hagar. Sarah is at wits end, and has expended all of her measures to retain her integrity in this matter. However, Abraham decides to empower Sarah to handle the matter as it pleases her. This was a

⁴ John L. Thompson, *Source: Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 59 no 2 Ap 1997, 213-233. Publication Type: Article, Database: ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials.

costly mistake in resolving the issue because Sarah is very defensive, full of emotions, and fueled with revenge against Hagar. “Genesis 16:1-6 shows that Sarai and Abram sought to accomplish what they wanted without trust in God, using methods of their own devising. Because they did not wait on the Lord, the result, as seen so often in Genesis, was suffering, as well as failure to achieve the desired goal.”⁵ Again, the text does not give us specific details on the conversation between Sarah and Hagar, but the colloquy must have been severe and harsh because Hagar fled into the wilderness. The appropriate response from Abraham should have been to define the roles of the women in his life, and set the boundaries and expectations of those roles so that each woman clearly understood Abraham’s perspective. This was an opportunity for Abraham to be a man about his affairs and exercise his authority as the husband of his women.

“But Abram said unto Sarai, Behold, thy maid is in thine hand; do to her as it pleaseth thee. And when Sarai dealt hardly with her, she fled from her face,” (Genesis 16:6). Abraham’s reaction is typical behavior in many irresponsible fathers today who leave the controversial and complicated conversations to be resolved by the women in their lives while the man, father and husband remain silent in the background. Abraham’s reticence was displayed when Sarah initiated the idea of consenting to the marriage of Hagar, and when Abraham was silent after disturbance erupted between his two wives. Abraham’s voiceless responses proves that men who remain silent on issues in regards to family only complicates an already fragile family paradigm, yet when exercised appropriately, the power of a man’s voice can also settle senseless conversations. Abraham was man enough to consent to the desires of Sarah to marry Hagar for the

⁵ George Van Pelt Campbell, Source: *Bibliotheca sacra*, 163 no 651 Jl-S 2006, 276-291. Publication Type: Article, Database: ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials.

purposes of birthing a son and there are no evidences of hesitation or reservations from Abraham regarding Sarah's request. Therefore, the irresponsibility of Abraham's actions are twofold: Abraham should have held fast to the promises of God from the beginning, rebuked his wife Sarah for thwarting the plans of God, and remained faithful to God's promises; and, after consenting to Sarah's hastily decisions, Abraham should have been the apologetic party in the matter and made every effort to resolve the conflict between Sarah and Hagar so that his relationship with his son would not be impaired by the drama of the women in his life.

Abraham's first-born son with Hagar, Ishmael, is approximately fourteen years old when Sarah gives birth to her son, Isaac. In Genesis 21, Sarah witnesses Ishmael mocking the celebration and a promised fulfilled in the birth of Isaac, and becomes engulfed in rage and demands that both Ishmael and his mother Hagar be cast out of the community and far from their dwelling. Abraham is saddened by another dramatic episode, but consents to his wife Sarah and sends Ishmael and his mother off with some bread and water. According to the custom of the day, Abraham has met the minimal requirements for banning persons from his community. However, as the father of his son Ishmael, and Hagar being the mother of his son, Abraham was well equipped to give Hagar and Ishmael more than a loaf of bread and a gallon of water. Abraham was extremely wealthy, yet with haste again, makes no financial means to support his son Ishmael and his mother Hagar. The supplies Abraham gave to Hagar were quickly depleted, and Hagar becomes uncertain if her son Ishmael is going to survive starvation. Hagar was so convinced that Ishmael was going to die that she placed him in the shrubs of the wilderness as to not witness her son take his last breath. As Hagar was weeping,

the angel of the Lord appears to her, springs up a well of water in the wilderness, and commands Hagar to hydrate the child and assured her that the Lord would be with Ishmael. While Sarah and Isaac were living the finest of life, Hagar and Ishmael were struggling to survive. Abraham, although saddened by the decision he had made, still falters in warranting the proper welfare and care for his son Ishmael. Isaac was the newborn receiving much attention, but Ishmael was an adolescent who desperately needed the guidance and reassurance of his father Abraham. The age of fourteen was a critical time of development of males, and is often the most overlooked timeframe. From this time period, there is no mention of Ishmael's engagement with Abraham his father recorded in the text until they reunite at Abraham's burial,

As the father of many nations, and as great of a man as Abraham was, he still faltered in handling the affairs of Hagar and playing a continuous active role in the life of his son Ishmael. Abraham's circumstance was extremely complicated, perhaps more complicated than anyone may ever understand, but the outcome of the situation still holds true that Ishmael and his mother Hagar became collateral damage. Although God promised to be with them, Ishmael was raised without his biological father who had the means and authority to be active in his son's life. Abraham lived with his father Terah until he was seventy-five years old, being heavily influenced by his father, receiving a portion of his inheritance, and being exposed to his father's belief system and traditions. Yet Abraham who grew up with a father in the home vacates his responsibility after fourteen years with Ishmael because of women disputes and the inability to exercise his authoritative power.

For Ishmael, his last memories of his father Abraham was witnessing his mother and he being ridiculed and thrown out of the family, and many years later, standing over the grave of his father. While Isaac only had great respect and memories of his father, Ishmael could have been bitter and full of resentment towards his father. Here we have two brothers who perhaps have two totally different perspectives of the same man who was now deceased, never able to rectify the relationship between his two sons and their mothers. Like many instances today, Abraham's experience proves that one father can be seen as great, positively influential, and a patriarch of faith to one child, while another child only wonders why his father was absent in their life, perhaps loved the other child more than the other, and what made the circumstances so bad that the child deserved such callous punishments as to not be raised by the father who consented to bringing them into the world. Abraham's fatherhood occurrence demonstrates that complexities of life often governs the decisions of fathers in complicated situations, and the outcome of those decisions drastically affects the children involved in those affairs. Abraham did not have to be an absentee father to Ishmael, but chose this disposition to keep peace between himself and Sarah his wife. However, one can only imagine how different the outcomes would have been if Abraham was more active and participative as a father in Ishmael's life.

Our New Testament nuance juxtaposes the lack of relationship between Abraham and Ishmael to an Apostle Paul and a young slave girl under demonic distress. In Acts 16, the Apostle Paul had begun his second missionary journey, and believed to have been accompanied by Silas, Luke, and Timotheus.

And it came to pass, as we went to prayer, a certain damsel possessed with a spirit of divination met us, which brought her masters much gain by soothsaying: The

same followed Paul and us, and cried, saying, These men are the servants of the most high God, which shew unto us the way of salvation. And this did she many days. But Paul, being grieved, turned and said to the spirit, I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her. And he came out the same hour. And when her masters saw that the hope of their gains was gone, they caught Paul and Silas, and drew them into the marketplace unto the rulers, And brought them to the magistrates, saying, These men, being Jews, do exceedingly trouble our city, And teach customs, which are not lawful for us to receive, neither to observe, being Romans. And the multitude rose up together against them: and the magistrates rent off their clothes, and commanded to beat them, (Acts 16:16-22).

Preaching throughout the region of Galatia, Paul and his companions sojourn to the region of Macedonia after seeing a vision of a man beckoning for ministry in that area. Reaching the territory of Europe, Lydia, a seller of fine linen dyed in purple, became the first convert of Paul's missionary journey after hearing and believing the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Lydia's faith was courageously contagious, as she invited the missionaries into her home, and consequently, her entire household also believed the Gospel and became baptized believers. However, experiencing victory in ministry over Lydia's household, Paul and his missionaries were faced with a female victim under the influence of a spiritual stronghold.

As Paul and his missionaries traveled to a place of prayer, the young slave girl follows the missionaries and boldly claims them as servants of the Most High God. Daily, this young damsel would boast the identity of the missionaries, forsaking her responsibilities as a fortune-teller, and anxiously anticipating a new opportunity to announce the purpose of these strangers in Europe. Becoming grieved and irritated by the young slave girl, Paul turned to her while she's in mid speech, and rebuked the spirit in her to come out of her in the name of Jesus Christ. Within the same hour of being rebuked, that evil spirit that had possessed this young slave girl for some time had left her to be free from the influence of divination. Consequently, Paul's action to rebuke the evil

spirit caused an uproar reaction from those masters who profited much from the slave girl's demonic behavior. The greater problem in the damsel's deliverance was the mere fact that her masters were comfortable at profiting from her dysfunctional disposition. Paul's decision to deliver the damsel from demonic distress caused a discrepancy in the flow of Roman denarii. These men who enslaved this young girl were prostituting her gifts, making a fortune from her failure to function as a normal human being, and were quite displeased when her life seemed to have changed for the better.

This unnamed damsel, possessed with a demonic spirit, taken advantage of by manipulative and deceptive men, demonstrates a statistical reality in the Twenty-First Century of the destiny of young girls who desperately suffer from the lack of positive fathers and male figures in their lives. This young slave girl found herself working for dishonest masters who assessed her genealogical gap of positive male role models, and swiftly took advantage of her because she obviously had a desire to please a male in her life. Most children, both male and female, seek courageously the approval of their father, as the male figure typically sets the standards and measures of expectations in the child's life. With no mention of a father or positive male influence in the text, this young girl battles for her identity and desires to please what she may feel as a father figure in her life.

Unfortunately, her masters set an expectation for the young slave girl to be a fortune teller, given the evidence in the text, and the gravity of the masters' response to Paul's deliverance of the damsel, she must have become very crafty in her trade as she was very profitable to them. This young slave girl did not have a desire to be a fortune teller, ruled by men who only wanted her for trickery, but she found herself enslaved in a

system that left her voiceless in her own personal affairs. The damsel's crave for satisfactory approval of her desires in life fell into the hands of male masters who molded her into a person that was easily manipulated. The young slave girl only wanted to have a sense of belonging, but because her biological father was absent in the text, and perhaps in her life, she was left to fight both psychological and spiritual struggles on her own volition.

The text in the sixteenth chapter of Acts concerning the damsel possessed with an evil spirit also demonstrated to its readers just how desperate this young slave girl was to transfer her fallen state of public shame into the hands of men who appeared righteous. The damsel demonstrated a longing to be saved from her pitiful condition, and she cried out every day to those male missionaries who she felt were servants of God. This scene of outcry was perhaps not the first time that the damsel has screamed for fatherly attention. Perhaps being separated from her biological father, or birth into slave conditions and having no voice in her own fate, this damsel was orphaned and her future was determined by the highest bidder at the auction blocks. Despite the details and specificity of her journey, she maximized on the opportunity presented before her, to capture the attention of the right men who had the authority to forever alter her destiny.

The damsel in the text represents so many children who behave disruptively because they lack positive fathers and male role models in their youthful and adolescent years. This young slave girl also proved that although she had fallen into the wrong male hands, and she was also possessed with an evil spirit, that she was not a lost cause and only needed the right attention from men who knew how to speak the right words. This damsel, although possessed with a spirit of divination, was still able to recognize her

opportunity for deliverance, and continuously cried out to the missionaries, until she received the positive response she so desperately longed for. Paul, and the other missionaries, was not the young slave girl's biological father, but were able to see a gap in her genealogical identity as well as a need for a spiritual encounter. At the risk of upsetting the economic benefit from a young girl's dysfunction, Paul became grieved at the damsel's cry for deliverance, not solely because the spirit in her vexed his nerves, but because her cry contained a plea for mercy. Therefore, the damsel was not only crying for help to be delivered from the evil spirit and her illicit masters, but also a cry for a godly man to show her positive attention.

For many years, the damsel was in the face of men who only wanted to inappropriately use her talents for their own gain, but now she has the opportunity for her identity to be redefined by men, fathers, who loved God and could reposition her spiritual and psychological destiny to never devalue her again. Paul's encounter with the damsel in the sixteenth chapter of Acts demonstrated to its readers that fathers must be willing to hear and interpret the cry of our children who so desperately need their identity to be confirmed by fathers who love God and only want the best for their children.

Secondly, Paul demonstrated the power of a godly man's voice that can liberate an adolescent who has been victimized by illegitimate males or absentee fathers. Finally, Paul concluded by exhibiting the punishment that may follow after saving a young person's life. "Spiritual divination was an important source of income for the owners of the slave girl. In the twinkling of an eye the name of Jesus Christ brought an end to their lucrative business. Their anger and frustration are understandable. This pattern repeats itself throughout the New Testament and many countries where the preaching of the

gospel has broken down spiritualistic and magical practices and beliefs.”⁶ Paul and his missionaries were beaten and thrown into prison because they had a heart and compassion to be fathers.

The fight for men to be fathers and positive role models never come without some form of beating and punishment from the stances of political views and opposition, and to those who are close to the abandoned adolescent but would rather see them struggle than to see their salvation. “When the gospel threatens financial interests or the establishment that is related to evil, we should expect to see oppressive reactions from those who have lost their privilege.”⁷ Paul risked it all, even for one slave girl who he never met before, and because Paul filled a void of fatherly absenteeism in the damsel’s life, his God did not forget about him when he was imprisoned for the cause of doing the work of an evangelist and being a father figure.

Paul demonstrated a defining moment that ultimately altered the livelihood of a young slave girl by applying his theological perspective and biblically liberating the damsel from the duality of oppression from a spirit of divination and her masters. Paul further proves to us that fatherhood is the act of being in the moment, active and alert to oppressive forces that may be restraining our children from becoming productive persons. Although Paul was not her biological father, he felt the urge to rescue this girl after noticing the absence of productive, positive males in her life. In essence, it is this type of behavior demonstrated by Paul that provided the recipe for ridding a stronghold that could have easily perpetuated a cycle of fatherly absenteeism.

⁶ Rakotojoelinandrasana, D. Source: Word & World, 21(2, 2001)191-197 Publication Type: Article, Database: New Testament Abstracts.

⁷ Ibid., 194-195.

CHAPTER THREE

HISTORICAL FOUNDATION

This chapter attempts to recall the source of fatherly absenteeism from its earliest known existence and address why those symptoms are still prevalent that has caused such a residual, epidemic effect especially and specifically in the African-American culture. Discovering the origin and systemic behavior of fatherly absenteeism will assist greatly in a deeper understanding of its historical foundation.

Fatherly absenteeism in the African-American community has a short stem of existence that erected and gave visible evidence in the mid 1900's, but its root cause was birth from an American tragedy that has generated a negative ripple effect, plaguing this country, and particularly, the African-American culture. There was an unimaginable time in the Afrocentric era that promoted tranquility in the home as fathers presumed a posture of equilibrium that demonstrated the ideal structure of family dynamics, spearheaded by the men. This historical reality may seem unimaginable given all the dramatic, spiraling statistical data of today that overwhelmingly thwarts our positive images of African-American fatherhood, but the alarm of absenteeism have not always been a case study. Faith, family and fidelity rested at the core of the Afrocentric characteristics, morals and values that determined a healthy, functioning, balanced home in the African community. Men loved and cherished their wives, groomed and raised their children, and made necessary provisions to secure their households. Absenteeism was not genetically woven

into the fabric of the Afrocentric existence and to practice such a behavior as absenteeism was shunned and caused an outpouring of shame by the entire community. A male figure that assumed the role of husband and father during this era was considered prosperous, mature, responsible, and prominent. For many generations a high expectation of fatherhood responsibility was the norm and there were rare instances of men who vacated their families and abandoned them out of neglect. With such a robust mentality for family structure, absenteeism would have no fertile grounds to take root, aggrandize and become the cancerous weed that is plaguing the Twenty-First Century African-American community.

However, in the Western civilization of the world during the early 1600's, there was a lucrative business erupting of exporting tobacco to Europe. As this economic shift created a demand for more tobacco production to be exported, a need for additional workers were inevitable, coupled with the desire for monetary advancement, gave birth to the idea of human trafficking and slavery. With a sensation to burn and smoke a plant of the nightshade family, and the massive exports and sales of tobacco, would eventually catapult the legalization of African slavery in the Western civilization. While African families were residing in their own homelands, cultivating their own crops and gardens, a freed people exercising their own cultural experiences, the most horrendous labor force initiative was preparing to launch that would revolutionize both African and American history. Colonial civilization and establishment in the Americas would cause an upheaval in the continent of Africa that would forever alter livelihood of its residents and natives that no apology would ever remedy. The British colonies of North America were convincing enough to persuade the legislative and judicial system that the legalization of

slavery would supply a labor force to service the economic boom of the exportation of goods in the West to other parts of the world. Legalizing servitude in a few British colonies of North America purposely fueled a petition that authorized one of the largest recorded human trafficking and slave trade industries known to humankind. This catastrophic era of slavery would unveil centuries of complications that drastically impaired the now African-American community.

The methodological approach to capturing slaves and exporting them from their native land was gruesome in every aspect of health: physically, emotionally, spiritually, financially, socially and psychologically. In particular, the male slaves were in high demand because of their stout physique and ability to till the grounds that yielded more results in production. These male slaves were targeted by abductors, brutally beaten into submission, and arrested in the presence of their families and friends. Despite the fact that these male slaves screamed and fought against the enslavement but were subdued by stronger forces and weapons that exceeded their limited defensive strategies. Male slaves abducted in this manner were not given the opportunity to say farewell to their families and had the slightest notion of their future destination. “For black men and women, slavery was an equally devastating experience. Both were torn from homeland and family. Both were forced to perform grueling labor, subjected to mental and physical degradation, and denied their most basic rights. Enslaved men and women were beaten mercilessly, separated from loved ones arbitrarily, and, regardless of sex, treated as property in the eyes of the law.”¹ The seize and capture process of enslavement weighed heavily on the mental stability of the families affected, and over a period of time, would

¹ Production of Thirteen/WNET, *Slavery and the Making of America* (New York: Educational Broadcasting Corporation, 2004).

eventually cast anticipatory fear throughout the African community. This arduous reality swept away numerous Africans into American slavery, and as a result, an entire continent suffered an economic downturn in population, loss of family dynamics, emotional instability, and severe reduction in tribes and communities.

After the capture of slaves, disproportionately males, exporters would secure the slaves by tying their hands and feet, and packing them forcefully into cargo ships to be exported to the British colonies of North America. Hundreds of slaves would populate the ship to journey across the seas, and several would become severely ill and even die during the excursion. Very minimal accommodations were given to the slaves, and the anxiety of being swept away from their native lands further complicated their medical conditions. Slaves that died during the journey were thoughtlessly thrown overboard and others were buried at shore or cremated. Once the cargo ships docked and landed its destination, slaves were stripped of their clothing, saturated with oil, perused and poked by potential purchasers, and eventually sold into slavery on the auction block. These slaves were now the official property of their slave masters, and with no law to favor the slaves, the masters were self-governed to task their new possessions in any manner that pleased the slave owner. The process of buying slaves was most embarrassing and dehumanizing.

A mass exodus of African males were uprooted and deported from their homelands to unknown territories to be degraded of their masculinity and freedom. The first generation of slaves were accustomed to African traditions and culture, and enslavement created a forced absenteeism in Africa, as these men did not voluntarily vacate their fatherly responsibilities, but were abducted from their roles as husbands and

fathers. Considering the horrific circumstances of slave capture and trafficking, absenteeism was birth as a result of a frenzied act of greed, lack of respect for all humanity, and a selfish desire of prosperity and wealth at all costs in the Western civilization. Many women and children in Africa were deserted, neglected, and abandoned because abductors imprisoned their husbands and fathers and deported them to America. Historically, fatherly absenteeism stemmed from an Afrocentric quandary beyond the control of its inhabitants and against the desires of those enslaved.

These male slaves that were stripped from their homelands and painstakingly reassigned to a totally new philosophy of life had to adjust to a culture that introduced a stronghold on their livelihood, self-worth, dignity, and masculinity. The first generation of male slaves in North America was worked vehemently, and the expectations of their slave masters often exceeded their physical abilities, although these male slaves were robust in nature. Graphic details of the enslavement process were afresh in their minds, and the cries of their wives, children and family remained piercing in their ears. These male slaves longed to return to their families and native lands, but was retained against their desires and forced to adapt the reality and consequences of slavery. Slave masters gained many dividends from the labor force of African slave men, and began to strategically implement a measure that allowed male slaves to procreate with female slaves. Multiplying the slave labor force became an inexpensive tactic for the slave master to attain more workers, and the parental rights of the child were ultimately the slave masters. Male slaves were constantly traded from one master to another, which heavily depended upon the obedience and submission of the male slave. When slaves, particularly males, rebelled and tried to escape to freedom, the consequences were

extremely severe, and would often lead to death. Procreation was at the discretion and permission of the slave master, and there was no guarantee that the slave master would allow the new family to remain unified throughout their lifespan. Whenever a slave master wanted to trade a slave for land, money or goods, another form of forced absenteeism was witnessed in North America among the slaves, and women and children were again deserted, neglected, and abandoned unwillingly by the male slaves.

Slavery introduced fatherly absenteeism in the African and African-American communities simultaneously by abducting men from their families in Africa and trading or selling their male slaves to other slave owners in America. With these continued slavery tactics, family dynamics and structure, or the ideal of a balanced household consisting of husband, wife and children, would only be envied by the slaves. Progression and rapid legalization of slavery destroyed African-American families in the 1600's, and two generations of slaves were birth into a new culture in North America that embraced the stigma of enslavement as normality of life.

The legacy of slavery is tragically relevant to the issue of Black fatherhood, for the conditions of slavery in the United States provided exactly the opposite of what is required in order to preserve the fragile bond between father and child. By law, the male slave could fulfill none of the duties of husband and father. The institution of slavery created a subculture where all the societal norms, mores, expectations, and laws, instead of helping to connect men to their offspring, forcibly severed the bonds between fathers and their children.²

From this time period to the late 1800's, African-American families suffered from forced fatherly absenteeism predominately because of the assiduous enactments and consequences of slavery.

² "Turning the Corner on Father Absence in Black America" in the Journal of Religion (Atlanta, GA: Morehouse Research Institute, 1999), 10.

Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation in 1863 resounded with a clarion call to cease slavery in America. As with most drastic cultural changes, especially of this magnitude where many White slave masters prospered greatly from the benefit of having slaves, slavery resumed with reservations as many had become accustomed to the lifestyle. The movement towards the embracing of ended slavery has been noticeably recognized by the response of slaves in Galveston, TX who began to walk and run away from their slave masters when they learned of the Emancipation Proclamation. Amazingly, the President of the United States, Abraham Lincoln, declared the end of slavery in 1863, but because many slaves were not allowed to be taught to read and write, nor privy to social and economic information. Instead, two years of illegal slavery would continue before slaves gathered the tenacity to respond to the freedom of slavery. With the movement and response of the slaves in Galveston, TX to embrace Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation, more slaves received the news and began to rebel against their slave masters. Those slaves who were courageous strategically planned escape routines to be freed from slavery. Many of those endeavors proved successful, while other attempts resulted in recapture, punishment, and even death. Lincoln's decision was not the most favorable among Whites, and many demonstrated their disagreement with outrage, violence, and hatred towards slaves who exercised their right to freedom.

Hate crimes in the late 1800's towards African-American freed slaves were a direct result of the Emancipation Proclamation. Slave masters foresaw the need to retain slaves to work the tobacco, cotton, and vegetation fields. Affluent Whites desired slaves to be cooks, attend to their personal affairs, clean their homes, raise their children, and perform other duties deemed undignified to esteemed persons. When freed slaves

rebelled in masses, the response from many settled and established Whites in America stimulated abhorrence towards the freed slaves, and thousands of slaves became the victim of brutality, racism, and discrimination. Freed slave women were taunted and raped. However, the freed male slaves suffered a much more severe punishment of exercising his freedom. Male slaves were always treated more harshly than the female slaves, and the post-proclamation era propelled that rage to brutally beaten, stabbed, shot, wounded and killed in the most hideous manners. Many were lynched publicly and privately, nailed to crosses, soiled in gasoline and set on fire, or hung from trees with their bodies being discovered later. White men would invade their home, take the men by force, and murder them in the woods during the night.

The hate crime era in America was a mere reenactment of the grueling reality that occurred in the 1600's in Africa. African-American men were again the target of hatred, and the quantity of African-American males killed during this time of horrific crimes continued the distress of forced absenteeism. These freed male slaves were permitted to raise families, marry other African-American women, and procreate like the Whites in their own habitats. When freed slaves relocated from other parts of America, some were fortunate to reunite with severed family members, and others were able to find suitable companions to enjoy their lives with in matrimony. However, the freed African-American slaves would still have to endure a stronghold that randomly eradicated the males through violence and death, victimizing the women and children to experience a life without their husband and father. This era would not last as long as slavery, but nearly one hundred years of hate crimes resulting in the death of African-American males is copious in fatherly forced absenteeism.

With hate crimes continuing strong against African-Americans as a demonstration of racism and discrimination, America was interrupted by an economic collapse of the Stock Market in 1929 that eventually ushered in the Great Depression era. The United States economy was officially bankrupt, millions of citizens were in despair, and President Hoover heavily faulted for the economic demise. During the 1932 presidential election, Franklin D. Roosevelt became the victor and unfolded his leadership initiatives known as the New Deal Programs. The Great Depression was horrific, and even with new leadership in the White House, the American people were struggling to recover from such a devastating curvature in the economy. After nearly a decade of recovery initiatives from the Great Depression to improve the livelihood of America, World War II would begin circa 1939. Considered to be the “deadliest conflict in human history,”³ African-American males who served in World War II would again be tasked to vacate their homes, abandoned their families, and serve a country that has ill-treated them for centuries.

There were “more than two and a half million blacks who registered for the draft in World War II and an estimated 700 black males that resulted in casualties during the war.”⁴ This number may seem insignificant to the millions of lives lost globally and ethnically, but with an African-American culture that is facing fatherly absenteeism unlike any other ethnicity, all loss must be factored into the equation. Those millions of African-American males who survived the strenuous and laborious effects of the war,

³ Donald Sommerville, *The Complete Illustrated History of World War Two: An Authoritative Account of the Deadliest Conflict in Human History with Analysis of Decisive Encounters and Landmark Engagements*, (Wigston Leicester, UK: Lorenz Books, 2008), 5.

⁴ Martin Binkin, Mark J. Eitelberg, Alvin J. Schexnider and Marvin M. Smith, *Blacks and the Military: Studies in Defense Policy* (Washington: The Brookings Institution, 1982), 24-25.

returned home to be with their families, but not without emotional and psychological damages that permanently altered their perspectives on life. Commonly known as “battle fatigue,” “gross stress reaction,” and “shell shock” would later be studied and researched to be medically known as Posttraumatic Stress Disorder, or PTSD. “Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is an emotional illness that is classified as an anxiety disorder and usually develops as a result of a terribly frightening, life-threatening, or otherwise highly unsafe experience.”⁵ When these African-American males returned home, the experiences of WWII were fresh in their minds, and there were minimal efforts made to mentally rehabilitate these soldiers to safely reintroduce them to their families and the society. Left alone to resolve their own emotional conflicts, African-American relationships were challenged as a direct result of the effects of WWII that was mentally fatiguing to African-American male soldiers.

Many of the African-American soldiers became alcoholics, drug users, and physically abusive towards women and children as a remedy to cope with the inescapable pains of their real life experiences. “PTSD sufferers re-experience the traumatic event or events in some way, tend to avoid places, people, or other things that remind them of the event, and are exquisitely sensitive to normal life experiences.”⁶ These symptoms were also common among other ethnic male groups who served in WWII and suffered from PTSD. In reality, the millions of African-American families who waved their fathers, husbands, brothers and loved ones off to war, many of those that returned were not of the same mental capacity when they initially departed. These African-American males were

⁵ “Posttraumatic Stress Disorder,” MedicineNet, Inc., accessed March 4, 2013, http://www.medicinenet.com/posttraumatic_stress_disorder/article.htm.

⁶ Ibid.

different internally, wrestling with an experience that only those who served with them could relate. Their families were confronted with a predicament that they were ill equipped to resolve. As a consequence, the divorce rate among African-Americans who had a husband that served in WWII drastically increased, and more families were severed and tasked to become single parent homes. “Even in the face of concerted and persistent discrimination, including economic discrimination, and the harsh inequalities of Jim Crow, many Black families maintained two parent households well into the 1960s, when rates of out-of-wedlock births began to escalate dramatically. In 1960, twenty-two percent of all Black babies were born to unmarried mothers. By 1996, that figure had jumped to 70 percent.”⁷ Forced absenteeism that was a pandemic in the African-American culture has now shifted to a new era of absenteeism that erected from the side effects of war. Mental instability, substance abuse, and random acts of violence towards others would now become the motive and rational for fatherly absenteeism in the African-American community.

Absenteeism in the African-American community has been historically challenged by severe diverse venues that continued to bleed into the Twentieth Century, well after the ending of slavery, the dawdling of hate crimes, and the mental aftermath of World War II. “Economic, cultural, and policy changes that have devalued fatherhood in the West in general and in the United States in particular, have hit the African American community especially hard.”⁸ The economy was still in shambles and the competition to find security in the American workforce remained tasking with racism and discrimination

⁷ “Turning the Corner on Father Absence in Black America” in the Journal of Religion (Atlanta, GA: Morehouse Research Institute, 1999), 10.

⁸ Ibid., 10.

still a factor against African-American males. Financial security is an intrinsic component to the stability of a family and home, and without that financial balance, more African-American marriages and relationships became strained and nonexistent. Employee discrimination would become the new stumbling block for many African-American males, who suffered injustice solely based on their ethnicity. “For the first time in the 20th century, most adult males in many inner city ghetto neighborhoods are not working in a typical week. The disappearance of work has adversely affected not only individuals, families, and neighborhoods, but the social life of the city at large as well.”⁹ The inability to secure a consistent form of work, places an unbearable burden on African-American males that provides little to no resources and means to fulfill their roles as fathers. “The problems of joblessness and social dislocation in the inner city are, in part, related to the processes in the global economy that have contributed to greater inequality and insecurity among American workers in general, and of the failure of U.S. social policies to adjust these processes.”¹⁰ Many African-American males met and exceeded the qualifications to fulfill the roles of the job descriptions, but their opportunities were extremely limited due to prejudice and insecurities of White superior influences. As stated by Elijah Anderson, when “a critical mass of jobless people are concentrated in the inner city community, various factors come together and conspire to produce an almost intractable result. In these circumstances alienation thrives and little that is conventional retains legitimacy.”¹¹ The tangible outcomes of slavery, hate crimes, war, and a discriminatory economy propel

⁹ William Julius Wilson, *When Work Disappears: The World of the New Urban Poor* (New York, NY: Knopf, 1996), 3.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Elijah Anderson, *Code of the Street: Decency, Violence and the Moral Life of the Inner City* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton and Company, 2000), 320.

a desperate African-American society, predominately males, to venture into criminal activity that further complicates an already sophisticated dilemma of fatherly absenteeism.

Those intractable results manifested in several forms, but two conspiracies have significantly impacted the African-American communities, which are illegal drug use and sale, and the Welfare System. Illegal drugs, historically, became the quick fix remedy to the financial insecurity many African-American males were facing. A drug boom detonated in the 1980's, and a strong recruitment of African-American males became drug users and drug distributors. Illegal drug sales were free of taxes, immediate cash on hand, and was rewarding in the mindsets of the dealers because their dividends could multiply rapidly. Many African-American males resolved to selling drugs that began as a means to support their families and provide a monetary source that was deprived of them by their local society. Drug use and sales became such a nuisance and turmoil in the United States that Congress began passing laws that harshly punished and imprisoned those who participated in the illegal trafficking of drugs. Consequently, many African-American males were arrested and charged with healthy penalties that resulted in several years behind prison bars.

In most states in America, particularly California, African-American males are statistically one of the smallest ethnic groups in the state, but ranks the highest of those incarcerated in the prison system. Thousands of African-American males were imprisoned for some form of illegal drug activity and countless more lost their lives in the rigors of street life surrounding the trafficking of illegal drugs. The drug movement was such a strong influence that African-American males became very territorial to

control revenue and cash flow opportunities, and an unsympathetic eruption of Black-on-Black crime unveiled that astonished the African-American community, America, and the world at large. “The leading cause of death among African-Americans males ages 15-34 is homicide.”¹² According to the U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Statistics, there are over 800,000 African-American male inmates in state or federal prisons or local jails in the United States.¹³ Furthermore, the same statistical source states that sixty-five percent of African-American male inmates are aged twenty to thirty-nine.¹⁴ The incarceration system in the United States retains fathers who have been arrested for some form of law breaking activity that has devastatingly drawn the African-American male away from their families. As history continues to progress, African-American males have continually suffered a form of forced absenteeism that heavily faults a weakened and discriminatory economy coupled with desperation to participate in illegal activities such as drug sale and trafficking.

Welfare became the additional boom in the African-American community, a governmental subsidized relief program for families who were experiencing some form of financial distress. The problem with welfare as it relates to the African-American community was the stipulations within the guidelines that seemingly discouraged the rebuilding of family that basically banned a male figure in the home. These welfare policies provided temporary financial assistance to mothers and their children, but consequently excluded the fathers that embraced a practice of forcing men away from their children in the home. Welfare empowered mothers to receive groceries, live in

¹² Alvin Poissant, *Why Blacks Kill Blacks* (New York, NY: Emerson Hall, 1972), 27.

¹³ U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs. Bureau of Justice Statistics (April 2012, NCJ 237961).

¹⁴ Ibid.

subsidized quarters, and have other forms of benefits as a welfare recipient without the assistance and support of the children's fathers. There was a zero tolerance policy for having men, particularly fathers, in the home while the mother and children received welfare benefits. This mentality developed a duplicitous character between the mother and the father, and forced more strains on the relationship to reestablish bonds and build a unified family. Since most of the African-American males whose children receive welfare benefits are unemployed, welfare itself became the income that financially sustained the family. African-American mothers became very protective of their benefits and would physically and verbally drive the father of their children away from the home in fear of risking and losing their welfare benefits. For the typical African-American fathers, recovery of original stature and position in the home and family seemed unimaginable. Discrimination and racism frowned on opportunities to prosper, economic advancement has been scarce, and a stronghold of family division vexatiously drove them to a meaningless role in society.

Throughout history, forced absenteeism has been evident in the African-American culture. The systemic problem that erupted in the early 1600's with the legalizing of slavery in North America has been tremendously difficult to recover from. African-American fathers are innately dancing with a force that constantly challenges their masculinity, fatherhood, and decent societal roles. When African males were driven away from the wives, children and families during the abduction period in Africa, screams and cries of despair and discomfort pierced the ears of those men as they were helplessly deported to America. Those African males fought the relentless and beckoning cries of their loved ones to stay and secure their families and homelands, but obviously failed and

surrendered to their capturers. As time and history evolved, the very cries that motivated African-American males to fight against the negative forces are the same ear piercing sounds that sadly drive African-American males away. The infectious syndrome that has weakened the African-American culture of responsible fathers has always been forced absenteeism. History has revealed that fatherly absenteeism in the African-American community is not a Twenty-First Century origin, but a devastating recapitulation of the horrific historical events that interrupted the soundness of the African community. The side effects seen today are only visible evidences of a deeper, internal disease that requires precision surgery to extract a rapid growing, cancerous epidemic that is forcing a tremendous hurt of forced absenteeism in the United States among the African-American culture.

CHAPTER FOUR

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION

This chapter engages dialogue and explores the leading theological ideas that address the awareness of fatherly absenteeism and its overwhelming nature. Major theological stances will be identified both in comparison and contrast from a professional, practical, and pragmatic position that wrestles with the epidemic of fatherly absenteeism in the African-American culture.

Black Liberation Theology has been the topic of controversial conversations since its inception in the late 1960's by the National Committee of Black Church Men that was primarily presided over by a distinguished and influential gentleman named Dr. James H. Cone. Embedded within this theological perspective is the identification of the black experience and struggle in America as an oppressed people of the slave movement and racial injustices. Conceived during the zenith of the Civil Rights Movement, Cone bridged the Black church and the social, discriminatory abnormalities of the Black people in view of their innate, intrinsic relationship to God. Black theology is defined by Cone as:

A theology of black liberation. It seeks to plumb the black condition in the light of God's revelation in Jesus Christ, so that the black community can see that the gospel is commensurate with the achievements of black humanity. Black theology is a theology of "blackness." It is the affirmation of black humanity that emancipates black people from white racism, thus providing authentic freedom for both white and black people.

It affirms the humanity of white people in that it says “No” to the encroachment of white oppression.¹

In light of this definition, Cone is both culturally and consciously connected to the cruel realities of the black experience and committed to making America responsible for its actions historically and currently. It is evident historically that the intent of slavery was to demoralize Blacks and reduce its ethnicity to servitude and oppression, which slavery successfully accomplished for at least two centuries in America. Given the executive order of the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863, President Abraham Lincoln declared all slaves to be freed from the oppression of their slave masters. However, slavery continued for several years later, and the relentless racial tension and hostility towards freed slaves stifled the mentality of Blacks to pursue freedom, opportunity and value themselves as equal counterparts to Whites in America.

The longevity of this freed, but second-class citizenry of Blacks in America catapulted the necessary Civil Rights Movement. Founded by determined and progressive Black leaders like Dr. Martin Luther King. The Civil Rights Movement was an effort to balance racial inequality, to eradicate prejudice and discriminatory behavior, and to forge a theological truth that God created all humanity equal. Cone emerges from this very real context, being shaped and molded by his experience as a Black man in America, and aids in the fight against racial and social injustices. It was Cone’s desire to prove a correlation between theology and black liberation. Cone aspired for all Blacks in America to be liberated from the oppression of Whites. Cone conceptualized an identity of the sufferings of Christ with the struggles, oppression, and sufferings of Blacks in America. Cone understood the theology of liberation as “a rational study of the being of God in the

¹ James H. Cone and Gayraud S. Wilmore, *Black Theology: A Documentary History, Volume I: 1966-1979* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1979), 101.

world in light of the existential situation of an oppressed community, relating the forces of liberation to the essence of the gospel, which is Jesus Christ.”² Interpreting Cone’s theology of liberation, he is strongly suggesting that the oppression of Blacks closely resembles the oppression that the incarnate Christ experienced, and that God’s ultimate plan of salvation is to identify with the oppressed people and liberate the oppressed from their oppressors. There are a plethora of scriptures throughout the entire Bible to support Cone’s theory in its proper context and interpretation.

However, some authors, theologians, and historians have viewed Cone’s perspectives as extreme in the sense that he takes the Bible out of proper hermeneutical context, and injects and imposes his own interpretative theology into the scripture that equates to false doctrinal belief relating to Christ and the Black experience in America. According to theologian and author, Dr. Anthony B. Bradley, “Cone’s deepest desire was to help black people address the mystery of white oppression and racism that engulfed much of our world at the time of his early writing.”³ Acknowledging Cone’s passion and pursuit of liberation, Bradley in his book *Liberating Black Theology: The Bible and the Black Experience in America* “argue that the major flaw of black liberation theology is that it views people perpetually as victims.”⁴ For this theological foundations reflection, Bradley’s work will serve as the platform of critique for the black liberation theology.

² James H. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1990), 5.

³ Anthony B. Bradley, *Liberating Black Theology: The Bible and the Black Experience in America* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2010), 529/3949, kindle edition.

⁴ Ibid., 101.

Bradley concurs with Alistair Kee, author of *The Rise and Demise of Black Theology* that black liberation theology is dead. Black liberation theology was doomed from the beginning because its initial biblical and theological presuppositions were grounded in the reduction of the black experience in America to that of victim.⁵ John McWhorter defines victimology as “the adoption of victimhood as the core of one’s identity”⁶ and that “it is a subconscious, culturally inherited affirmation that life for blacks in America has been in the past and will be in the future a life of being victimized by the oppression of whites.”⁷ McWhorter further states that “the remnants of discrimination hold an obsessive indignant fascination that allows only passing acknowledgement of any signs of progress.”⁸ Bradley, and his supporting cast, affirms that black liberation theology was grounded in victimhood and built its structure of liberation for Blacks on the foundation of victimology. His theory is also coupled with the belief that Cone and his followers failed to “ground black theology in the full authority of Scriptures.”⁹ Bradley contends that black liberation theology is deceased primarily because it embraced a mentality of victimhood while simultaneously ignoring the imperative of sound hermeneutical application in relation to the experience of oppression and slavery in America. The combination of these two costly misapplications is the founding framework and total substance of Bradley’s defense against black

⁵ Alistair Kee, *The Rise and Demise of Black Theology* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2006).

⁶ John McWhorter, *Losing the Race: Self-Sabotage in Black America* (New York, NY: Perennial, 2001), 3.

⁷ Anthony B. Bradley, *Liberating Black Theology: The Bible and the Black Experience in America* (Crossway Books, 2010), 158/3949, Kindle.

⁸ McWhorter, *Losing the Race*, 2.

⁹ Bradley, *Liberating Black Theology*, 221/3949, Kindle.

liberation theology. Although Bradley manufactured clever work in his disputation against black liberation theology, his arguments have generated some fallacies, perhaps embryonic suppositions, which must be addressed to fully understand the Black experience and perhaps better appreciate the work of Cone.

Since victimology is at the root of Bradley's disposition, an objective definition of victim is described as "somebody who is hurt or killed by somebody or something, especially in a crime, accident, or disaster."¹⁰ Of the many painstaking realities and consequences of slavery is that its disastrous tactics enforced all slaves to become victims. Slaves suffered victimization at the superiority of oppressors who claimed the right to possess Africans as personal property. At the discretion of the owner, which in America where predominately White, the slave was subject to carry out any act and responsibility commanded by the oppressor. Sale, trade, punishment, labor and death were at the pleasures of the slave owner, and both slave and owner fully conceptualized this mentality. Bradley accuses Cone of birthing a victim mentality when the targets have been set in the wrong direction. Slavery was and still is the root cause of victimology in the Black experience. Cone attempted to liberate Blacks from this mentality of living with an oppressive mindset. Bradley, in his efforts to define victimology, has attempted to exterminate a historical reality that slavery has caused irreversible damage in the African-American community, and to simply erase the memories of slavery as a cure-all remedy is promoting insanity.

Bradley believes that black liberation theology serves no purpose in our societal norms of the Twenty-First Century because forced desegregation exacerbated victimology. Furthermore, it is his belief that Blacks have no excuse to attach or associate

¹⁰ Microsoft. *Microsoft Encarta Dictionary*. (St. Martin's Paperbacks, 2008).

their current realities and struggles in America with slavery because those days have expired and have become an irrelevant historical artifact. Bradley's fallacy is the failure to realize that the residue of slavery still permeates the minds of African-Americans, and although slavery was not a first-hand experience for millions of African-Americans, the realities of slavery is engraved in the fabrics of their being and existence. Erasing slavery from history, failing to teach the slave trade in schools, or dismissing the topic of slavery altogether is not going to resolve the hurt and pain African-Americans have experienced with slavery. The greater problem with slavery and the victim mentality that it arouses is the modern day reinventions of slavery in different modes of transportation and delivery. To deny that racism is no longer an issue in America is yet another fallacy. Bradley is inadvertently challenging African-Americans to dismiss the ancestral history of cruelty to slaves while simultaneously enduring negative currents of prejudice and racism in today's society. The victim mentality lingers in the minds of the African-American people because it is often refreshed by new forms of oppression. The identity of the African-American people was solidified in the sufferings of slavery, and although overcoming the ordeal, the rehabilitation process of liberating persons from that gruesome experience has been the utmost obstacle. African-Americans will not simply overcome being a victim of the greatest form of oppression. Cone recognized this phenomenon and attempted to identify the sufferings of Blacks with the sufferings of Christ, and God having immeasurable compassion on those who were oppressed. Many of today's problems in the African-American community, to Bradley's disapproval, point backwards to the unresolved issues of slavery.

Fatherly absenteeism in the African-American communities today is systemic of slavery because families were destroyed, separated and abused, and generally the males were stripped of their husbandry and only allowed to see their wives for procreation. The harshness of slave activities and the rebuilding of the African-American family have to be founded upon the correct identification. Lack of education in the African-American community also stems from slavery as it was at times illegal for slaves to learn to write and read. Several modern day commentators and authors such as Bradley, McWhorter, and Kee enforce an ideology that African-Americans should dismiss blaming slavery for their lack of self-progression, but that request proves dismal because the mind of the person must be liberated first before the will of the person acts in progressive manner. Bradley fail to acknowledge that White slave owners were wrong and the demonic spirit that possessed oppressors to authorize slavery still hoovers in the modern day America.

When the Emancipation Proclamation was given, a large percentage of White slave owners were not in approval of the movement. Hence the reason that many slave owners did not inform their slaves that a right to freedom had been passed. Much attention has been given to African-Americans moving forward with their lives and ambitions, but very few contributors are making a conscious attempt to fight against the flawed mentality of millions of Whites who still pose an affinity for servitude and superiority. The problem with rehabilitating the African-American community in their thoughts of victimology and not rehabilitating Whites in their thoughts of modern day slavery and servitude is that there remains a continual creation of hatred that gradually takes root in our societies. Very little research has been conducted to explain why Whites cruelly mistreated African-Americans in this country. The African-American community

silently craves for some form of explanation, and even if there is no apology, the reasoning helps resolve the negative reverbs of their painful history. There has been so much focus on the issues of black liberation theology from Bradley's stance that there has been a failure to explore the deficiency of the oppressors. Bradley states, "If we do not begin with God in our understanding of the human person, we will not develop a proper understanding of what the human person is in the fullest possible sense."¹¹ Bradley provides this statement to reinforce his belief that Cone's black liberation theology begins with the oppression of Blacks and moves towards theology. Bradley's fallacy is his failure to correlate a thread of theology that builds a bridge from the mercies of God to the oppression of people, even if the people are Black. Bradley's disassociation with the historical realities of slavery causes his perception to be skewed and seemingly proposes that salvation has no relationship with oppression. This view contradicts a history of God's divine interaction with those who were under the affliction of oppressors. For instance, the children of Israel were oppressed by Pharaoh and the Egyptians for centuries, and God liberated the children of Israel through the obedience of Moses. Jews were enslaved at the oppression of Adolph Hitler, and God orchestrated a series of events to free the Jews from an attempted mass genocide.

In Luke 4:17-19, Jesus divinely decided to read scripture from the Book of Isaiah which boldly stated "to preach deliverance to the captives" as evidence of the purpose of an incarnate Christ, (Luke 4:17-19). Understanding the human person that begins with God was never a flaw of Cone, but perhaps a flaw of Bradley. There seems to be the climatic tone that Bradley does not believe that African-Americans are adequate and

¹¹ Bradley, *Liberating Black Theology*, 234/3949, Kindle.

worthwhile recipients of God's plan of salvation. All scripture in relation to salvation directs Christian orthodoxy to believe that the liberty of the oppressed is on God's agenda. To denounce slavery and erase that historical reality, Bradley can easily qualify his assertion that Blacks do meet the definitions of an oppressed people. Furthermore, Bradley concurrently liberates those who oppressed the Blacks in America from any punishment warranted by God. Since the 2008 campaign election of President Barack H. Obama, Bradley has appeared on several television shows attempting to define black liberation theology. Bradley credits both President Obama and Dr. Jeremiah Wright for the exposure to mainstream television and has made every attempt to disprove the validity and necessity of a black liberation theology.¹² Many of Bradley's hosts have been those of the conservative White population, as they have adopted Bradley as their manual to make sense of racial tension and scapegoat to assume responsibility for their repulsive past and their continued hideous present behaviors. Bradley has positioned himself as the clear conscious of the oppressors, defending those who have intentionally victimized others while charging African-Americans as guilty of retaining a victimhood mentality.

Bradley reminds his readers rhetorically that beginning with God in our understanding of the human person helps to us to better develop an understanding of the human person in totality.¹³ Bradley does not suggest, however, which group of people need to better understand the other group of people. For African-Americans, their mentality is attempting to understand the reasons why slavery was mandated by oppressors, and furthermore, why the residue of slavery and injustices still smog our

¹² Bradley, *Liberating Black Theology*, 234/3949, Kindle.

¹³ Ibid.

atmosphere. The difficulty in understanding the oppressor from a victimized, oppressed stance is that no one has defined the true intent and purpose of the oppressor in the Black experience. Bradley explains to the world through his writings, lectures, and interviews why African-Americans should not embrace victimology because he sees African-Americans through the lens of God and has developed a better understanding of their plight. None of Bradley's appearances have revealed his revelation of viewing the oppressors through the lens of God and developing a better understanding of their "fullest possible sense."¹⁴ Therefore, the oppressors from Bradley's theological perspective are liberated through their own self-righteousness and forgiveness because the oppressors denounce victimhood in the mentality of the African-American people.

Bradley continues to upset the equilibrium of justice by ignoring an obvious deficiency in the oppressor and reprimanding the oppressed for not overcoming a dreadful side effect of slavery. Black liberation theology speaks vividly to the problem of fatherly absenteeism in the African-American community because it traces its roots of this widespread epidemic back to slavery. Whether or not the oppressor takes some ownership in this contagious reality by acknowledging that slavery divided the Black family, destroyed homes, killed the men, molested the women, and enforced labor on the children, the upward mobility of the struggle is to liberate African-American males from a deeper captivity within the mind. Slavery has embedded a negative residue that has internally attached itself to the psyche of the African-American conscious, and is in dire need of liberation that begins with the oppression and moves towards a deeper understanding of God. When Moses was commissioned by God to be a mouthpiece and chosen vessel to liberate the children of Israel, Moses' primary responsibility was to free

¹⁴ Ibid.

God's people from servitude and oppression, and Moses later began teaching the people the precepts of God. Moses did not enter Pharaoh's domain and begin to have Bible study lectures with the children of Israel after their laborious slave responsibilities. To the contrary, Moses met the people where they were emotionally, psychologically, and economically, and proposed to the children of Israel the plan of God to liberate them from oppression. In Exodus 4:30-31, the children of Israel had inspired hope to receive Moses' message because they believed that God "had looked upon their affliction" and their mentality was changed. Once the children of Israel knew that God had compassion on their oppression and that God was going to handle their oppressors, Moses was able to begin discussing the plans of God for their life and their future generations.

Many of the miracles of Jesus in the New Testament immediately dealt with the oppression of the people prior to the revelation of Christ Himself starting with the birth of Christ. Jesus was born in oppression, having been hid from Herod who decreed to have male babies under two years old killed and actually being born in a pasture with grazing animals using old rags as cloths for warmth and protection, (Matthew 2:16). Jesus' first recorded miracle in Cana could be classified as potential prevention of oppression because weddings in that contexts was a festival that lasted for weeks, and to deplete a vital source and life of the party as wine would have caused shamed upon the newlyweds and their families. Without revealing that Christ was the Messiah, Jesus turned water into wine to eliminate a possibility of newlywed oppression. The paralyzed man, the blind men, the deaf man, the speechless man, and the man with a withered hand were all forms of oppression because none of these men were able to work and their physical limitations caused them to be treated as outcasts and second-class citizens. Jesus recognized this

oppression, and healed their physical situation first, allowing the miracle to minister to their psyche and accept Christ as God's Messiah. If Bradley is correct in assuming that Cone's black liberation theology began with the oppression of people and moves towards a deeper understanding of God, then Cone's application of liberation theology is warranted based on the actions of God and Christ in the Bible. With absentee fathers in the African-American community, the liberation of oppression must begin with the victimization that very few absentee fathers comprehend. Cone identified with God in the sense that God shared the experiential oppressive nature of people with leaders who had passion for God and God's chosen, and who would be able to meet oppressed people at their immediate need to alleviate them from the practice of oppression. As it was with Moses, Joshua, Elijah, and others, Cone's too was commissioned by God during the horrific height of the Civil Rights Movement to recognize a spirit of captivity that was resting on the minds of the African-American people. There still remains some excess soot in the African-American community that warrants a black liberation theology, to wash away the ashes of oppression, especially in the fight against fatherly absenteeism.

Many theologians, such as Bradley, have peeped into the theological window of Cone's perception and were offended at his extreme view of black liberation theology. Cone affirmed, "God was on the side of oppressed blacks in their struggle against white supremacy."¹⁵ The offense comes because, accepting the victimization theory of Bradley, Blacks were not to think that they had the right to call the behavior of white supremacy unethical, immoral and unholy. Cone must be understood from his lens that "the black experience and the Bible together in dialectical tension serve as my point of departure

¹⁵ James H. Cone, *God of the Oppressed* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), 3.

today and yesterday. The order is significant. I am black first – and everything else comes after that.”¹⁶ Ethnicities who have never endured the weight of oppression will view the will and intent of God differently than those who have experienced oppression. African-Americans relate closely to the God who seeks to eradicate oppression, or deliver those from the hands of the oppressor, because our historical reality with slavery qualifies our need of a Redeemer. For years, oppressive methodologies were launched to disassociate God being concerned with the Black struggle, oppression, and experience in America. God does have a divine plan and love for the oppressed, and Blacks align perfectly with the plans of God.

The challenges of repairing the brokenness from the slavery experience that permeates through side effects such as fatherly absenteeism is much more complex than simple victimhood and a quick fix to get over the past. The injury that resulted from slavery that has manifested itself in sores of fatherly absenteeism in the African communities requires spiritual and psychological rehabilitation with surgical precision from an infusion of theology that braces black liberation. Any doctrinal belief that opposes this procedure is a mental assassination on the reestablishment of a healthy African-American culture. African-American males have been victimized by an oppressor and the prescription to begin the healing process and restoring strength to the African-American communities is black liberation theology.

¹⁶ Ibid.

CHAPTER FIVE

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

This chapter presents written expertise in the focus area of the ministry project. Included are contemporary foundations research and an attempt to fully discuss specifically why certain books, experts, and sources were used in support of fatherly absenteeism in the African-American culture.

There are several contemporary writings from various fields and disciplines that bring validity to fatherly absenteeism in the African-American culture of the Twenty-First Century. The objective in the theoretical foundations section is to engage each author's perspective and to determine how their views interrelate with the views of this ministry model or how those views may be opposing. After a thorough engagement in dialogue with several authors whose works address the common concern of fatherly absenteeism in the African-American culture, a determination will be unveiled to further develop the hermeneutic and application for a proposed project of ministry.

Notable author and legal scholar, Michelle Alexander's *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, addresses her concern of the many black men that have become the target for potential prisoners that continuously fund a multi-billion dollar prison industry. The industry is regulated by a strategic criminal justice system that unjustly incarcerates large volumes of African-American men, and consequently, "they are legally denied the ability to obtain employment, housing, and public benefits – much

as African-Americans were once forced into segregated, second-class citizenship in the Jim Crow era.”¹ In an effort to enlighten the drastic effects of incarcerating black men to balance the greedy economics of the prison industry, while simultaneously dividing families and leaving children to be reared with absentee fathers, Alexander states “we have not ended racial caste in America; we have merely redesigned it.”² Alexander supports the argument that far too many African-American men are being incarcerated at an alarming rate.

Additionally, the U.S. justice system has no plans to educate or perhaps rehabilitate offenders. Instead, the system cripples their destiny by limiting opportunities of success, hoping that their desires to achieve expire in exhaustion, and result to criminal behavior that unfortunately imprisons them again. Alexander further proves that the more African-American men that are absent from the home because of incarceration, the more probable the perpetual cycle of imprisonment continues with those families of convicted men who are also fathers. As in the dreadful past of a very racial, prejudice, and discriminatory America against African-Americans, a new model for racial discrimination has erupted with a focal interest in the “communities of color.”³ This mass incarceration of African-American males has left millions of homes, families, and children without their fathers and their sons.

¹ Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York, NY: The New Press, 2012), 4.

² Ibid., 2.

³ Ibid.

Clayton Obie and Ronald Mincy in *Black Fathers in Contemporary American Society* “looks at father absence from two sides, offering an in-depth analysis of how the absence of African-American fathers affects their children, their relationships, and society as a whole, while countering the notion that father absence and family fragmentation within the African-American community is inevitable.”⁴ Hill Harper in *The Conversation: How Men and Women Can Build Loving, Trusting Relationships*, states “In 1966, more than 84 percent of all Black children were being raised in two-parent households. In 2006, just forty years later, fewer than 33 percent of all Black children were being raised in two-parent households.”⁵ Despite the declaration that the re-establishment of Black families with fathers in the homes are doomed, there remains a hopeful diagnosis that proper grooming and transformation will revitalize African-American men to their rightful positions. Obie, Mincy and Harper recognize how insubstantial a home can be without the father, and the robust significance that a father brings to the family dynamics.

Before the mass incarceration through the criminal justice system, a climate has been created in the American society and workplace that strategically weaves out the marginalized and the African-American male, making life extremely difficult to manage and cope with in a legalized and civil manner. With little to no job opportunities, many African-American males find themselves becoming hustlers, drug dealers and engaging in criminal activity that inevitably leads to incarceration. In *Code of the Street: Decency*,

⁴ Obie Clayton, Ronald B. Mincy and David Blankenhorn, *Black Fathers in Contemporary American Society: Strengths, Weaknesses, and Strategies for Change* (Manhattan, NY: Russell Sage Foundation, 2006), ix.

⁵ Hill Harper, *The Conversation: How Men and Women Can Build Loving, Trusting Relationships* (New York, NY: Gotham, 2010), xv.

Violence and the Moral Life of the Inner City, Elijah Anderson examines the stigma of race, the fallout from rampant drug use and drug trafficking, and the resulting alienation and absence of hope for the future.”⁶ Anderson recognizes that many African-American males are the victims of jobless opportunities that hinder their hierachal needs in life, or those same males are discriminated against because of their race, and consequently, find alternatives of survival in drug sales and use as well as other illegal activities. William Julius Wilson in his book *When Work Disappears: The World of the New Urban Poor*, intentionally argues that “many of the most rapid increases in concentrated poverty have occurred in African-American neighborhoods.”⁷ The need for employment or some form of consistent, legal cash flow is necessary to sustain a household, and even more vital for the African-American male to feel a sense of manhood and stature. The overall theme that supports the claims of absentee fathers in the African-American communities continuously stems from a country who fails to take ownership of an unapologetic past that has systemically entangled the minds of African-American males and has failed to provide a sense of security free from bias and stereotypes that already weakens a fragile perspective from an African-American male’s point of view.

Douglas A. Blackmon in his book *Slavery by Another Name: The Re-Enslavement of Black Americans from the Civil War to World War II* depicts a time where African-Americans were freed legally through the Emancipation Proclamation, but struggled mentally to embrace that reality while simultaneously facing a darkness of prejudice that

⁶ Elijah Anderson, *Code of the Street: Decency, Violence and the Moral Life of the Inner City* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, 2000), 32.

⁷ William Julius Wilson, *When Work Disappears: The World of the New Urban Poor* (New York, NY: Vintage, 1997), 11.

threatened their right to exercise freedom. Blackmon calls this era in American history an “Age of Neoslavery” that thrived as a consequence of Civil War and continued to emerge through World War II.⁸ Blackmon supports the claim that the continued slavery in America and the injustices against African-American males has catapulted an epidemic that has divided families and caused a long-lasting psychological damage on the African-American community. Much of the racism today that exists in all fabrics of the American society against African-American males was revitalized and stemmed from the emergence of the neo-slavery era. Unfortunately, in the Twenty-First Century, America still continues to thrive in public and private racism today with a loud reverberation.

Incarceration of mass proportions ails the African-American communities today, but during the decade of the 1970’s through the 1980’s, a new emergence of ridding African-American males from their homes in an unprecedented manner caused casualties and family calamities through the military enlistment. An issue of controversy whether African-American males should have served in a military for a country that enslaved them has always been a subject of mixed reactions. However, the argument in this theoretical application is to prove that their enlistment to serve contributed to a frail skeletal system of retaining men in the homes with their families and their children.

Martin Binkin and Mark J. Eitelberg writes on a subject entitled *Blacks and the Military: Studies in Defense Policy*, which addresses the positive and negative effects of African-American men serving in the military during such a time of civil matter and displayed prejudice in the U. S. against Blacks. While the authors suggested that the military offered opportunities that would not be afforded to African-American males

⁸ Douglas A. Blackmon, *Slavery by Another Name: The Re-Enslavement of Black Americans from the Civil War to World War II* (New York, NY: Anchor, 2009), 402.

through other means of employment, the authors also argued that benefits of enlisting in the military for African-American males may have proven to be more detrimental and damaging than progressive and developing. Binkin and Eitelberg states that:

Many Americans look with approval on the growth of black participation in military service, since it often affords young blacks educational, social, and financial opportunities that constitute a bridge to a better life not otherwise available to them. But for other Americans, the opportunities are outweighed by the disproportionate imposition of the burden of defense on a segment of the population that has not enjoyed a fair share of the benefits that society confers. From this perspective, the likelihood that blacks would suffer at least a third--and perhaps a half--of the combat fatalities in the initial stages of conflict is considered immoral, unethical, or otherwise contrary to the percepts of democratic institutions.⁹

With the alarming casualties of war unjustly placed upon African-American males in the military, families were deprived of having their soldier return home to be husbands and fathers to their families. With such a large proportion of African-American males drafted to active duty and severe wars, which devastatingly ended in death, more homes were left without fathers, and the emotional controversy of the draft painted yet another unpleasant picture of the views towards African-American males. Many of those African-American males that were fortunate enough to survive the casualties of war as soldiers returned home suffering with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, which consequently deprived them of being cognizant, sane men to father their children. The entire family was negatively affected by the loss of identity of the military male that suffered from this chronic illness.

A compilation of fury from the experiences of slavery that transpired into an unjust society, coupled with an unfair proportion of enlisted African-American soldiers in the military, caused an eruption of hostility and anger in the African-American

⁹ Martin Binkin, Mark J. Eitelberg, Alvin J. Schexnider and Marvin M. Smith, *Blacks and the Military: Studies in Defense Policy* (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1982), xi.

community. This public outcry was a clarion call for change and a last effort to plea for a fair opportunity in this country. While many psychiatrists and psychologists attempt to medicate and diagnose the anger that African-Americans felt, the solution was not in the prescription, but in the proposal to treat all men equally.

William Grier and Price M. Cobbs in their *Black Rage* states that “if racist hostility is to subside, and if we are to avoid open conflict on a nationwide scale, information is the most desperately needed commodity of our time.”¹⁰ Grier and Cobbs understand that the rage in the African-American community is not merely because African-Americans are born with anger in their anatomical composition, but because of the many years of affliction and harsh treatments against their fair share of life and opportunities. The rage is an outcry for justice and for others to not only see the dark reality that plagues the everyday lives of millions of African-American males, but for those in authority and the accusers to cease the hatred and violence against a people that has suffered for centuries at the cause of racism and prejudice. This rage that the authors speak of in their writing echoes through the fabric of every tangible connection that is interwoven in the African-American male. Perhaps the rage would cease if the racism, prejudice and discrimination would also cease. Slavery, prejudice, and racism that occurred in the historical past which, caused a rippled effect that eventually deteriorated the mentality and stability of the African-American male is a time that cannot be erased or changed. The most difficult challenge with a dreadful history of hatred is accepting that the time existed, that it was and in many cases, still is a present reality for millions of African-American males. The objective to overcoming such malicious memoirs is for

¹⁰ William Grier and Price M. Cobbs, *Black Rage* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2000), 4.

African-American males to rebuild the internal damages that have lingered in intrinsic fallacies that speaks untruth about the plight of African-American males. The destiny of the African-American male is not crime, absenteeism, penitentiary and an early death.

Frederick D. Haynes, III writes in his book *Healing Our Broken Village*, a methodological approach that holistically balances the life of the African-American community. Frederick Haynes states “families of our village are dealing with their individual internal issues which are getting in the way of what God wants us to do to bring about restoration to our broken village.”¹¹ It is apparent that when the African-American male is broken, bruised, and battered, that the entire community that is connected to that male is in some way negatively affected. The villages, neighborhoods, communities, churches, and schools have a vested interest in the total recovery of the African-American male. Perhaps our “villages” as Haynes refers to it is broken because our African-American males are broken. Their brokenness is the result of years of unfair treatment and made to feel like subordinates in every aspect of their lives and inferior to opportunities and aspirations that other ethnicities welcome with no bias. The African-American male has been marginalized for centuries and that mentality has unfortunately become a painstaking reality for millions of males whose dreams and hopes have been crushed under the foot of injustices.

Dr. Sam Davis, a notable pastor and author, once said in a sermon addressed to a heavily populated African-American congregation, that “some of you have been down for so long that getting up is not even on your mind.”¹² Davis’ attempt was to make his listeners aware that being down is not normal, but rather abnormal. For the African-

¹¹ Frederick D. Haynes, III, *Healing Our Broken Village* (Dallas, TX: St. Paul Press, 2008), 16.

¹² Sam Davis to Beulah Grove Baptist Church, 2008, Augusta, GA.

American male, sometimes the abnormalities of life are accepted as the normality and cease to fight the waves of change and improvement. Those waves of life have sickened the African-American male to the core of their souls just as an individual becomes seasick in unchartered waters a few miles from shore. These waves should have never existed, and for the African-American male, his stability is on the shores of life and not in the raging sea.

Although millions of African-American males have no experience with the outdated slave trade that existed in this country, there remains embedded within a deep psychological connection to that very real occurrence. The mere thought of an imaginative portrayal of African slaves smothered and packed in cargo ships like sardines arouses an emotional response that must be counteracted with a deep messaging promise of liberation to balance the emotional rollercoaster of the African-American male. Bishop T.D. Jakes, a world-renowned pastor and author, shares in this enlightenment and understands the shackles that African-American males may still cling to in the imaginary components of their psyche. In his book, *Loose That Man and Let Him Go!*, Jakes says “Absentee fathers and deadbeat dads have littered this nation with confused sons and angry husbands. Millions of bitter and abandoned young males are growing into men without mentors.”¹³ One of the many side effects that still complicate a normal life for African-American males is the misconception of their true purpose and identity, which can only be fully understood and perceived through a precise, modified lens of reality, without mystification. Those limitations that have held African-American males bondage for centuries have been identified, and now it is a matter of the patients keeping their

¹³ T.D. Jakes, *Loose That Man and Let Him Go!* (Bloomington, MN: Bethany Press Publishers, 1995), 98.

appointments with the physician. A major module in the foundation of securing a positive future for the African-American male is the passion for education. Most statistics prove that a lack of education leads to unfavorable conditions in life including minimum wage jobs, lack of health benefits, and low-income housing. The typical stimulus of the American dream for the average African-American male is only a fantasy in their minds that produce no tangible evidence that will motivate them to invest their desires and aspirations to become educated.

Baruti K. Kafele writes, “many educators, however well intentioned, are simply at a loss for what to do to improve the performance of their black male students.”¹⁴ The confusing thread that is woven in and out of the classroom atmospheres is to determine why African-American male students continue to refuse the educational opportunities as opposed to their Caucasian counterparts. Kafele in *Motivating Black Males to Achieve in School and in Life*, encourages African-American male students in secondary educational levels to “value learning, improve their grades, and maintain high standards for themselves.”¹⁵ Many school districts and curriculum designers must be confronted with the concerns of the educational paradigm shifts that continuously refrain from authentically painting a true depiction of American history. Some of the fear of being brutally honest about America’s history, especially the centuries of slavery, is that the truth would spark a rage in the African-American students. However, withholding the truth and dismissing the real occurrences of slavery in this country only fuels a rage and disengages African-American males from learning in the classroom setting.

¹⁴ Baruti K. Kafele, *Motivating Black Males to Achieve in School and in Life* (Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision & Curriculum Development, 2009), xiii.

¹⁵ Ibid, 14.

Other concerns are shared from authors like Michael Porter who writes in *Kill Them Before They Grow: Misdiagnosis of African-American Boys in American Classrooms*, that the lack of learning for African-American males is the problematic future of a dead-end class that fosters no real practical application of the material that was learned. Porter suggests that this lack of interest on the African-American male's behalf is viewed as a medical condition on the educator's behalf, ultimately misdiagnosing the Black adolescent to Ritalin, special education or remedial courses. Porter argues against a public school mentality "African boys cannot behave without special treatment, juvenile probation, and, in many cases, drugs."¹⁶ The attack on the minds of the African-American males is a strategic mental force that disables and demobilizes their opportunity to advance. Kafele is correct in stating that the greater importance for the African-American male is to see the value in the learning, even if there are disagreements, and to preserve a paradigm for themselves that will afford them opportunities later in life even though their educational experiences lacked a knowledge base for their true purpose and identity.

Mychal Wynn believes that the college-bound message is one that Black males must begin hearing in elementary school in *Empowering African-American Males: A Guide to Increasing Black Male Achievement*.¹⁷ Often times the African-American male student hears more of their misfortunes than they hear of messages to empower and motivate them. Misdiagnosing an African-American male, displacing them in remedial courses, and treating them as second-class citizens who are incapable of learning is an old slave methodology rewrapped in attractive coverings to hold them educationally hostage.

¹⁶ Michael Porter, *Kill Them Before They Grow: Misdiagnosis of African-American Boys in American Classrooms* (Sauk Village, IL: African-American Images, 1998), 5.

¹⁷ Mychal Wynn, *Empowering African-American Males: Teaching, Parenting, and Mentoring Successful Black Males* (Marietta, GA: Rising Sun Publications, 2005).

Recognizing the breach in elementary and secondary education pertaining to African-American history in public and private schools, fillers have been substituted in the gaps that have molded the African-American males through a strong influence. Subject such as politics, freedom, and classism that was avoided in the classroom setting was voiced vociferously through music that attracted the attention of the youthful African-American males. Music has been used for educational purposes in both optimistic and ambiguous manners, and for the African-American male, no music has been more instrumental in filling their historical gaps than the Hip-Hop culture. Bakari Kitwana writes *The Hip-Hop Generation: Young Blacks and the Crisis in African-American Culture*, “media and entertainment such as pop music, film, and fashion are among the major forces transmitting culture to this generation of Black Americans.”¹⁸ Kitwana also states that “Black youth culture cuts across class lines, so that whether one is middle class, coming of age in a suburban or rural setting, college-bound, or a street-wise urban dweller, what it means to be young and Black has been similarly redefined.”¹⁹ This study basically divides two ailing generations of African-American males by the influence of music, and how those affected males respond differently to cultural settings based upon their exposure or lack thereof, to hip-hop. As music has always lingered upon the emotional balances of all of humanity, for the African-American male, the message has been rooted in pain, frustration and agony mingled with a desire of self-identity, recognition and respect. In essence, the hip-hop generation of the African-American males is finding sobering solutions through music to better cope with the struggles of a

¹⁸ Bakari Kitwana, *The Hip-Hop Generation: Young Blacks and the Crisis in African-American Culture* (New York, NY: Basic Civitas Books, 2003), 7.

¹⁹ Ibid.

problematic existence that has challenged American politics to alter their responses to the rage. The Hip-Hop generation, however, has not only impacted the social, political and economic norms of modern day society, but that undulation flow of change has modified the manner in which most African-American religious leaders view the un-churched.

General observation has revealed that over the decades there has been a rapid decline in African-American men attending church. During the Civil Rights movement, the Black church was the centerpiece of the African-American culture for many years, but millions of African-American males felt unequipped by the efforts of the church to assist them in coping with a painstaking reality that constantly viewed them through the eyes of envy.

Music, such as the hits of the Motown movement, to the most current of the Hip-Hop generation, played a major role in counteracting the missions of the local Black churches to recruit and retain African-American males. Benjamin Stephens, III writes in his book *From Jay-Z to Jesus: Reaching and Teaching Young Adults in the Black Church*, “while young adults are trying to define who they are and what they are called to do, they are second-guessing themselves, their God, and their faith.”²⁰ Stephens takes an unorthodox approach in extreme measures to help Black church leaders understand the fate of the Hip-Hop generation of youth, and how their fate will drastically impact the sustainability and longevity of the church. Jawanza Kunjufu states “it seems like everybody is looking for the Black male,” including the Black church, in his book *Adam! Where Are You?: Why Most Black Men Don’t Go to Church*.²¹ Kunjufu wrestles with the broken mentality of African-American males and the stigmas they challenge themselves

²⁰ Benjamin Stephens, III, *From Jay-Z to Jesus: Reaching and Teaching Young Adults in the Black Church* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2009), 1.

²¹ Jawanza Kunjufu, *Adam! Where Are You?: Why Most Black Men Don’t Go to Church* (Sauk Village, IL: African-American Images, 1994), 4.

with about the political and social injustices in the world and the pretentious preachers that stand in the pulpit. The mentality that is restraining more African-American males from committing to discipleship in the local Black churches is a shared mental fallacy that views persons of influence and authority, particularly men, with a skewed sense of insecurity and distrust. In many instances, music of both the Motown and Hip-Hop generations have predisposed an idealism that focuses on the errors of the Black church rather than being compelled to be man enough to become change agents in those settings to erect a genuineness for future generations. The aspiration, according to Kunjufu, is to make aware of the authentic Adam in every African-American male and realign him with purposes and plans of God for his life. The absence of the African-American male in the Black churches are a consequence of years of lost identity that has evolved into major character flaws that manifest itself in ungodly demeanors. Within that evolution of flawed theory, practice, and behavior, the African-American male does not comprehend that an all-existing God would entrust him with such ecclesiastical responsibility. This faulty sense of worthlessness must be rid from the mental faculties of the African-American male.

Mark Strong also comprehends the importance of the Black church in the continued effort to strengthen and rebuild the fatherlessness that has become an epidemic in this country. In *Church for the Fatherless: A Ministry Model for Society's Most Pressing Problem*, Strong suggests, “we are currently experiencing a disconnection between fathers and children in dramatic proportions. The questions we must ask ourselves are, why are nearly half of the children in our nation going to bed at night

without a father in their lives?”²² Therefore, the Black church has just as much vested interest in the plight of the African-American male as other societal entities that may not fully understand the hurdles that these men must overcome to see themselves as precious human beings.

When African-American males were the voice of their homes, and their faith was demonstrated through the commitment of the local Black church, the entire family was active and participative in the life of the church. However, as hardships in inequality placed a strain on African-American males, many of those same families became broken through divorce, and the local Black churches and communities began a decline. Eleanor B. Johnson and Robert Staples state, “in African communities, marriage was not just a matter between individuals but the concern of all family members.”²³ In their book, *Black Families at the Crossroads: Challenges and Prospects*, Johnson and Staples assert that the birth of many challenges in the Black families spurred from the agonies of the slavery era in America. “Slavery, despite the problems it posed in terms of regulating human labor in a coercive relationship, was the most profitable source of labor available. There was little concern, in the beginning of the slave system, for the racial composition of the enslaved group.”²⁴ Those crossroads through African-American history have tremendously terrified the true development of Black families in America, and the rehabilitation process begins with the recovery of the African-American male. The stability of the Black family, despite the independent movements to rid males from the

²² Mark E. Strong, *Church for the Fatherless: A Ministry Model for Society's Most Pressing Problem* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 18.

²³ Eleanor B. Johnson and Robert Staples, *Black Families at the Crossroads: Challenges and Prospects* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2005), 2.

²⁴ Ibid., 6.

household, is recognizing the significant role that the African-American male offers to the equilibrium, longevity and livelihood of the home. Identity is obviously a dynamic distinctiveness that African-American males have suffered in their quest for defining their unique character. The lack of recognition of the authentic African-American males causes them to wander in a state of demise, losing hope of who they are and who they are destined to become. Myles Munroe states, “traditional male roles once gave men continuity and balance from generation to generation. Today, many men are questioning who they are and what roles they are to play in life.”²⁵ Living within a culture that continuously redefines the roles of a man, particularly an African-American man, can become quite complicated and perceived as a benchmark that is unattainable and a moving target that is designed to be missed. The perception from these redefining roles is that perhaps those who are setting the rules are maliciously altering the rules to keep the dream chasers of becoming an ideal man in a state of confusion. Munroe continues to state, “this uncertainty is disrupting their personal and professional lives, leaving them frustrated and causing them to live far below their potential. It is creating cracks in the foundation of society.”²⁶ Pastor Tony Evans once stated in a sermon addressed to men of all ethnicities that many of the societal cracks that we face in our schools, our homes, our churches, our communities, our nation and our world, is because the man, who is the foundation of the entire structure, is cracked.²⁷ When African-American men are not conquering their fullest potential, the negative societal effects are detrimental to the

²⁵ Myles Munroe, *Understanding the Purpose and Power of Men* (New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 2001), 10.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Tony Evans to Oak Cliff Bible Fellowship Church, 1996, Dallas, TX.

rebuilding of the Black family and community. Therefore, it behooves the societal norms to revisit the core of their intentions and discover how damaging the mechanisms of stereotypes are hindering a specific race of men from freely cocooning into the beautiful man he was created and destined to be.

The identity crisis that has become cancerous in the African-American male has been felt from the most poverty stricken streets in this country to the highly esteemed and accomplished dignitaries. Consider President Barack Obama, who writes in his book *Dreams From My Father: A Story of Race and Inheritance*, “at the time of his death, my father remained a myth to me, both more and less than a man.”²⁸ This struggle that was a real experience for President Barack Obama is just as real for the unnamed man whom the world has not come to know as a genius, a potential world leader and influencer who is disguised by his mistaken identity. The tangible effort begins with an innate interest to empower African-American males to recognize the king in them.

Steven Ozment in *When Fathers Ruled: Family Life in Reformation Europe: Studies in Cultural History*, writes that men “were not domineering or loveless men, nor were their homes the training ground for passive citizenry in an age of political absolutism. From prenatal care to graveside grief, they expressed deep love for their wives and children.”²⁹ Ozment revisits a patriarchal time in early modern Europe that demonstrates an ideal platform of how fathers behaved civilly in the homes and how beneficial those families were to have men who recognized and reconciled with their true

²⁸ Barack H. Obama, *Dreams From My Father: A Story of Race and Inheritance* (New York, NY: Random House, 2004), 6.

²⁹ Steven Ozment, *When Fathers Ruled: Family Life in Reformation Europe: Studies in Cultural History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983), 177.

identity as husbands and fathers. Through generations of turmoil, separation and ultimately slavery, the family dynamics were lost, the husband and father were displaced, and the structure and identity of the home was forever altered.

In similar connection to Ozment, Chancellor Williams entitles his book as *Destruction of Black Civilization: Great Issues of a Race from 4500 B.C. to 2000 A.D.* Williams reaches back to the livelihood and culture of the original African people in their native lands and gradually demonstrates how they transitioned to United States. Within his writing, Williams helps build the formation of original African men in their proper context, and how those dynamics and cultural essences changed during the slave trade. The values that many African-American families uphold today differ greatly from their ancestral beginnings in Africa. Perhaps Williams has a recipe that will help foster a more stable community of African-American families in the Twenty-First Century by recapturing the importance of African heritage many years ago.

There has been much engagement with contemporary authors who have tasked themselves with facing the struggles and challenges of the African-American male and his surroundings. This theoretical foundation has attempted to make plain and practical a very complicated and extensive matter that has awakened the consciousness of all societal parties to partake in altering an inevitable and unavoidable problem that stems from the effects of slavery. With the gathered resources and continued research, this theoretical proposal may be fully furnished to assist in eradicating the absenteeism of fathers in the African-American community.

CHAPTER SIX

PROJECT ANALYSIS

This chapter will assess the results of the project of the ministry and analyze the data, methodologies, and final design of the ministry model. Additionally, this chapter will suggest an implementation derived from a hypothesis that will attempt to alleviate the epidemic of fatherly absenteeism in the African-American community.

Action Research

Operation Save Our Sons was an initiative that focuses on equipping and educating African-American males that was founded by Dr. John E Guns, Senior Pastor of the St. Paul Church of Jacksonville, Florida. This ministry model design is a fairly new effort targeted at the fatherly absenteeism in the African-American community, but has seen positive results since its inception. By focusing primarily on the future generation of African-American fathers, the initiative confronts a perpetual cycle of fatherly absenteeism by educating the young males on the importance of living a life that is pleasing to God and as law-abiding citizens. This ministry model is progressive in acknowledging the need to aspire the future generation of fathers while simultaneously bridging the gap with absentee fathers and their children. This model is ingenious because the failures of previous generations of absentee fathers are embraced, addressed

and given tools to reconnect with their families while the next generation of fathers glean from the historical mistakes of their predecessors and are equipped to be more meticulous when considering fatherhood. This program “is designed to inspire males to strive for excellence for the sake of their personal future, the community, and the country. The *Operation Save Our Sons* initiative will empower young boys to maximize their potential for positive civic impact through contributions to their families and their community.”¹ here are major components of this ministry model that address ailments that have contributed drastically to the epidemic of fatherly absenteeism in the African-American community. Many of those goals include: decreasing crime and the incarceration of youth by increasing academic achievement, strengthening families by building solid father-son relations, preparing young males to be successful in school and assisting them with job training, teaching young males the importance of financial literacy, a character development component of the program to demonstrate the importance of making healthy decisions in life, how to effectively handle and manage conflict, and to develop program modules that can be implemented in the public school systems.²

Operation Save Our Sons has a dynamic vision for progressively resolving fatherly absenteeism by strategically focusing its attention on the African-American males and the need to invest in their development. This ministry model gradually reprograms the thought processes of the young African-American male, which coincides with the liberation necessary to eradicate fatherly absenteeism. Dr. John Guns has realized that the dissolution of absenteeism begins with the rescuing of the future generation of fathers in the African-American community.

¹ John E. Guns, Operation Save Our Sons, Inc., accessed October 2013, <http://ososnational.org>.

² Ibid.

Using a qualitative research process will allow more versatility when properly diagnosing fatherly absenteeism and the effects that the ministry model will have on this challenge. There are results that focus on the immediate impact of the initiative that will assist in gathering data to properly reach some conclusions. Many of the context associates are African-American fathers who have been in some form or another involved in fatherly absenteeism. Each of the context associates will be interviewed to gather their perspectives on the subject of fatherly absenteeism and how each of the context associates poses a solution for the problem. This analysis is important to the outcome of the data collected because each context associate bring their own bias from their personal experiences that will only aid positively in a holistic outcome for facing fatherly absenteeism. Since the focal group is predominantly African-American, an ethnography approach will also aid as a ground theory and study of fatherly absenteeism. Open-ended surveys will be conducted with at least fifty participants in the initiative that include the young males, mothers and fathers, and will be instrumental to the outcome of the ministry model. Interviews will also be conducted before and after the initiative to provide information and feedback on the effectiveness of the program. Several small groups will be formed to observe the participation levels of the participants, and to provide feedback on the receptivity of the information shared during the initiative. The context associates will be challenged to seek individuals such as fathers, young males, and mothers, to be involved in an ongoing study to deepen the understanding and potential remedies of fatherly absenteeism.

Persons that volunteer to take part in a study will require a three-month commitment, and will be interviewed once each month during the three-month timeframe. By continuing the case study after the initiative will provide more results as to the effectiveness of the *Operation Save Our Sons* initiative. Adopting a methodological triangulation approach, the context associates will be challenged to interview, observe, and document their analysis to share with the other context associates. All research data collected from the context associates will be shared anonymously with the entire group on a monthly basis, within the span of three months. After the three-month research and case study period, a final evaluation will be determined and a proposal made for a final conclusion.

Summary of Project Proposal

Fatherly absenteeism is a concern that cannot be resolved in one single event or effort. Therefore, an ongoing measurement to evaluate the outcome and impact of the *Operation Save Our Sons* initiative will be on a continuous basis. Fathers involved in the initiative will be interviewed once a month for three consecutive months to gather productivity and presence in the lives of their children. Single-parent mothers will also be interviewed once a month for three consecutive months to authenticate the activity of fathers in the life of their children and to assess how their children are achieving after being exposed to the initiative. The partnership between the two host churches will meet monthly for three consecutive months to assess the data received and give feedback to those participants based on their needs. Using a qualitative research methodology will allow some versatility in diagnosing the results of one-on-one interviews, peer group

sessions with single mothers and fathers, and gathering statistics of those who participated in the initiative. Although there is an objective to reach a quantity of absentee fathers to participate in the initiative, the ultimate goal is to produce a quality result of fathers that will gradually reshape the African-American community one father at a time.

Selection of Context Associates

The context associates were a selected group of African-American fathers who serve as mentors and leaders of the Men's Ministry at Moses Missionary Baptist Church of Augusta, GA. These fathers share a passion in fatherly absenteeism in the African-American community, and in their own personal experiences can relate to the epidemics of fatherly absenteeism. A component of their ministry objective as a men's ministry of a local church is to father children, particularly young males, whose fathers have abandoned or neglected them. Their ages range from twenty-five years old to eighty-eight years old. The educational balance in this group begins with at least a high school diploma and extends to terminal degrees in various fields. Many of the context associates are currently employed or have retired recently, with varying work experience.

Submission of a Project Timeline

Permission has been granted from Dr. John E. Guns, founder of *Operation Save Our Sons*, to use the initiative as a ministry model of research, study, and analysis, and to partner with the Historic Tabernacle Baptist Church of Augusta to launch the initiative in the local community. Dr. Charles E. Goodman, Senior Pastor of the Historic Tabernacle

Baptist Church of Augusta, board member of *Operation Save Our Sons* and a Professional Associate, has granted approval of the partnership and is prepared to move progressively for its implementation as a project and ministry endeavor to address fatherly absenteeism in the African-American community. The timeline will span a total of four months beginning January 2014. The first phase includes gathering all context associates to explain the ministry model, the expected launching date of the model, and their respective roles and expectations in the project. The ministry model will have a set date to be launched in Augusta by mid-January 2014. After the implementation of the project, the second phase involves context associates being assigned to volunteers from the project to evaluate and monitor over the next thirty days. At the conclusion of thirty days, context associates will meet collectively and review data and observations. This behavior will continue for an additional, consecutive two months. Any adjustments to surveys and data collection efforts will be discussed at each monthly meeting. At the end of three months, the third phase will require the context associates to submit all documentation, statistics, and analysis that will form a final outcome and conclusion. The project will expire in mid-April 2014, and all context associates will be relieved of their responsibilities. The final phase of the project implementation will render a proposal that will be prepared and ready for submission at the conclusion of the project timeline.

Results of the Model

On March 22nd, 2014, in the city of Augusta, GA, the Moses Missionary Baptist Church partnered with the Historic Tabernacle Baptist Church to launch an initiative entitled Operation Save Our Sons. Hosted in the gymnasium of the Historic Lucy C.

Laney High School, a collaborative team of volunteers assisted in the registration of nearly 300 participants, with 150 of those registrants being young men under the age of eighteen and 98% of those young men were African-Americans. Assisted by hospitable volunteers, persons were guided to the registration tables in the entryway of the gymnasium, and were presented with pre-event survey questions to gather information that would be later used for data collection, interpretation and analysis. After a brief registration and welcome to the summit, persons were allowed to visit several vendors and sponsor booths before entering the gymnasium. Those vendors included Georgia Military College, Costco Stores, 100 Black Men of Augusta, GA. Inc., Quincy Murphy Allstate Insurance, Crystal Neal, and the Department of Juvenile Justice.

Once inside the gymnasium, all participants were guided to sit on one side of the gymnasium's bleachers as a general assembly to begin the initiative. Orchestrated by an Event Coordinator and Director of Operations, Dr. Tujuana Wiggins, Principal of Deer Chase Elementary School, gave the outline of the summit and briefly introduced each person scheduled to present. Dr. Roberson, Superintendent of the Richmond County School System welcomed everyone to the summit and Dr. Robert Bush, a retired educator of the Richmond County School System, said a prayer. An eight-year old African-American male named Raymond Mann, III presented a speech that highlighted the necessities of a positive male role model in the lives of young men. The purpose of the event and the history of fatherly absenteeism were self-presented which detailed some of the research and study on this subject matter that reinforced the need for such events to take place within similar communities of my own context in ministry.

The summit would then shift into breakout sessions that offered classes for fatherless sons, men wanting and needing to be mentors, and a class for single mothers. The fatherless sons' class was surnamed "You Can Do This Sons" and was instructed by Rev. Dr. Charles E. Goodman, Jr., Senior Pastor of the Historic Tabernacle Baptist Church. The class for men was surnamed "We Can Do This Brothas" and was instructed by Gregory Davis, President of the Vision Builders Committee of the Moses Missionary Baptist Church. The single mothers' class was surnamed "We Can Do This Sistas" and was instructed by Minister Shavonne Williams, President of the Women's Ministry at the Moses Missionary Baptist Church. Each instructor was given one hour to present their lesson plans to their class and was encouraged to allow the class to be participatory, engaging and thought-provoking discussion. Considering the need for ministry in the area of absentee fathers within the African-American community, each class demanded more time to effectively address concerns from all groups, and to allow each instructor to provide additional resources outside of the summit. Granting an additional fifteen minutes to each class allowed the volunteers ample time to setup the next phase of the summit, which would be the panel discussion.

With a string of professionals and a wide range of experience and expertise, the panel discussion would highlight the essence and gravity of the summit. The guest panelist included: Dr. Ronald Wiggins, Principal of T.W. Josey High School; Dr. Laura Wheat, Professor of Counseling at Georgia Regents University; Mr. Elliott Bing, Officer at the Department of Juvenile Justice; Mr. Brian Anderson, Certified Peer Specialist and Recovery Educator at Georgia Regents University; Dr. Kenneth B. Martin, Senior Pastor of the Antioch Baptist Church; Mr. Corey Johnson, City Commissioner of Richmond

County Augusta; and, Dr. Charles E. Goodman, Jr., Senior Pastor of the Historic Tabernacle Baptist Church. Questions were prearranged and given to the panelist before the summit to allow thorough preparation and in-depth answers that would holistically benefit the listeners. The panel host was self-directed, and each panelist was given an opportunity to address questions and concerns that most adequately aligned with their profession and their passion. Some of those questions addressed the challenges that families, communities, and churches are facing today with fatherly absenteeism. More specifically, how this epidemic has shifted the normality of society, in what manners should the society respond, and what negative conditions is birth from this systemic problem if not quarantined in the immediate future. After ninety minutes of tackling tough and challenging questions, the panel discussion would conclude with an erupting applause from the listeners. Each panelist gave one last word of encouragement to the fatherless sons, mentoring men, and single-parent mothers that hopefully inspired to rise above their situation of absenteeism. All panelists received a \$10 gift card to Starbuck's Coffee and a hearty thank you from the Operation Save Our Sons committee.

Partnering financial resources together, both host churches provided a lunch for all registered persons, instructors, program participants, guest panelists, and volunteers that consisted of pizza, variety bags of chips, sodas, and bottled water. Power 107 FM Radio Station provided the summit with lively, upbeat music familiar to the ears of this particular context, and the volunteers began a raffle drawing to give away prizes to those who participated in the summit. The raffle prizes were intentionally tailored to minister to the needs of young men by rewarding them with gifts that most fathers would purchase for their sons. These gifts came through several streams of donors, and included such

items as: (2) \$25 Costco gift cards; (1) Shakespeare fishing pole; (2) men's watches; (2) men's leather belts; (1) Wilson football; (1) NCAA basketball; (1) 5 pack Nascar racecar kit; (2) men's body wash; (2) men's leather wallets; and, (12) Chik-Fil-A gift bags. With such excitement and enthusiasm from the raffle, coupled with the pizza luncheon, all participants were rejoined into the gymnasium for final words and corporate prayer. Dr. Charles E. Goodman, Jr., asked all persons to meet in the center of the gymnasium floor with the young men centered in the crowd for prayer. After a brief word of comfort and encouragement, prayer was offered for the entire summit with fatherly absenteeism as the focal point of prayer, and benediction was given as persons began to exit the gymnasium and the premises. Volunteers from both sponsor and partner churches of the summit assisted in the cleanup along with personnel from the Lucy C. Laney High School.

Gathering data from the summit that was collected during the registration process, ten men and twenty young men were identified to participate in a mentoring program. This mentoring program, stemming from the Operation Save Our Sons initiative, asked single-parent mothers to volunteer their sons in a three-month mentorship program that would actively engage a positive male role model in their son's life. Although there were more than ten fatherly abandoned sons registered for the mentorship, this project only focused intently on the ten sons and the twenty volunteer men. The volunteer men were identified during the breakout class session of the summit and agreed to sacrifice their time to actively participate in the mentorship program. Some of the responsibilities of the volunteer men included: visiting the school where the young men attended to ensure the young men were taking advantage of their learning opportunities, having healthy discussions with the young men about life and the roles of a productive male adult,

teaching the young men how to tie a tie, dress appropriately, fix a flat tire, and properly cut the lawn, supporting the young men in any extracurricular activities they may be involved in such as sports or band, and encouraging inactive young males to seek productive extracurricular activities, inviting the young men to attend regular church services and other church activities, and, giving feedback to the parents and professional associates detailing their involvement with the young men. Each volunteer adult male was assigned two young men to mentor, and every effort was made to assign each mentor in a manner that made it convenient to mentor them simultaneously. In most cases, the young men attended the same schools, churches and resided within the same community.

Continuing the three-month mentorship program, three one hour workshops were conducted in the Fellowship Hall of the Moses Missionary Baptist Church that addressed specific subjects in relation to sons abandoned or neglected by their fathers. During these sessions, a guest lecturer was invited that has demonstrated a passion in the subject area to help foster an environment of encouragement and growth for the young men.

Alternative resources to help expand awareness and outreach to the young men were also provided that assisted the mentors in a much more effective and impactful mentorship for the young men. Partnering sources helped mold an ideal that each young male was important enough to have several connections and healthy outlets within the community, and also heightened the importance of having positive reinforcements throughout the community to assist the youth in healthy behaviors. After each session, there was time allowed to address any questions or concerns and a light lunch was provided. This time was also an opportunity for the mentors to assess the retention of the young men in the mentorship program and to provide an opportunity for the mentors to spend quality time.

During the first Sunday's of the months of April, May, and June, a specific message was preached that addressed the ailments of fatherly absenteeism in the African-American community. These messages were tailored to inspire the young men who have been neglected by their fathers to rise above their circumstances and maintain a sense of integrity and self-worth. Each message ranged from thirty to forty-five minutes, followed by a prayer for the wellbeing of the young men. Embedded within each message was also an encouraging word for those adult males who may have resigned from their fatherly duties or have given up on the hope of being a positive male in the lives of their children. The objective of each sermon was designed to help each listener, regardless of their state or situation, to be an optimistic person believing that their obstacles in life, mainly fatherly absenteeism, is a hurdle that can be conquered with the right amount of faith and the right mentality. The overall consensus from the three sermons were that the men and young men were inspired to embrace the present and make a better future by viewing life through the lens of hope and opportunity.

Each mentee was required at the beginning of the mentor program to provide a copy of their progress reports to the mentors for evaluation and to implement a strategy should there be any deficiencies in attendance, behaviors, or grades. Considering the reality that the young men in the program were neglected by their fathers, many of them suffered academically in school and needed positive reinforcement in the area of education. By the mentors attending the schools, sitting in the classrooms with the students, and speaking to their teachers, there was a reported increase in all areas of academia for those young men who entered the mentorship program with problematic educational behaviors. One particular mentee was encouraged with just enough time to

correct their grades and behavior to be promoted to the next grade level. Within three months, the mentorship program drastically improved the grades and behaviors of many of the young men in the program because of a positive male role model influence. Ironically, the young men who were struggling academically whose grades improved gained a stronger sense of self-esteem and belonging. Although the mentorship program has expired, several of the relationships that were formed are now forged into a bond that may very well be lifelong and continual.

Culminating the Operation Save Our Sons initiative and the mentorship program hosted a fishing trip to Clark's Hill Lake for the young men by the men's ministry of the Moses Missionary Baptist Church. The fishing trip was a method used in which the mentors were able to bring the mentees together for a corporate time of fellowship and celebration. Many of the young men had never been fishing before, and others had never been fishing with their fathers. With the adult men sponsoring the trip with transportation, breakfast and lunch, fishing supplies, and other necessities, the trip would prove instrumental in the positive development of young men who were neglected by their fathers. To capture the expressions of joy and appreciation would only be witnessed by attending the event as young men gleaned to learn how to tie a hook, bait a hook, cast a line, and catch a fish. This fishing excursion would last for eight hours on the lake and each adult male ensured that every young man had the experience of catching a fish.

Within three months of building a relationship between men willing to mentor and young men willing to be mentored demonstrated that the biological component of being a father in the life of a son is only a small factor in the equation of productiveness. Throughout this project, in essence, mentors became fathers to non-biological young men

and mentees became sons to non-biological fathers. Operation Save Our Sons assists in proving that fatherly absenteeism in the African-American community can be combated with positive reinforcements when communities, churches, faith-based organizations, and volunteers partner their resources together to help in the fight of a common cause that is plaguing our society. Hopefully, one of these young men that participated in the summit, attended a workshop, listened to a sermon, or took part in the mentorship program, will gain a keen sense of responsibility and break the perpetual cycle of fatherly absenteeism.

Summary of Techniques for Data Analysis

After three months of interviews, case studies and participant observations, all notes, forms and information was collected to begin a thorough data analysis. The Operation Save Our Sons initiative provided a completed registration form from the participants, a pre-event survey asking seven questions, a post-event survey asking five questions while providing a comments section, a participant observation form, and finally, a male mentor volunteer form. All forms and surveys were sorted respectively to their nature to properly code and interpret the data. All noted information from the interviews were transcribed and arranged in chronological order by date and time. Field notes from the observations and mentors were transcribed and arranged in chronological order by date and time. Once all of the data was collected from the three months of interviews, case studies, and observations, the data analysis process was prepared to proceed.

Once the data was collected and sorted, the analysis began with the registration form from the Operation Save Our Sons. The registration form revealed that over 300 persons officially registered for and participated in the event. Other forms of data collection observing the initiative suggested that there were possibly fifty additional persons who attended the event but did not complete the registration process. The registration form asked participants for their name, phone number, email address, and if fatherly neglected sons would like to be contacted for future events. Upon further diagnosis of the registration data, 125 participants were males under eighteen years of age, 100 participants were single-parent mothers, and seventy-five participants were adult males. From a visual observational stance, one hundred percent of the 300 participants were of the African-American ethnicity. One hundred and eight registered young men less than eighteen years of age consented to being contacted for future similar events.

The pre-event survey asked questions reflecting on the interaction and significance of a father-son relationship. Fifty-two pre-event survey forms were completed and returned for data analysis. The data revealed, as a common theme, that many of the registered young men spent zero to five hours per week with their biological father. Most of the data from the pre-event survey revealed that spending time with their father was very significant, and even in the absence of a biological father, a great percentage of the registered young men had positive male role models in their lives. In respect to male role models, the survey also revealed that an overwhelming number of young men who suffered from fatherly absenteeism had a strong affinity to spend more than fifteen hours per week with their mentors. Many reported that they needed the most assistance with personal issues in life and educational pursuits.

The post-event survey asked five basic questions from the participants upon exiting the event describing their experience with Operation Save Our Sons and the workshops the initiative offered. The general consensus was that the event was very beneficial. Many participants felt a need for a continued series of the event, ranging from once a month to once every quarter. Several agreed that the organization of the event was very organized, and that the topics discussed in the event were very beneficial and applicable to their immediate needs. On a scale of one to five, the event received a 4.33 rating for overall success and functionality. In the comments section of the post-event survey, the overall feedback on future improvements included better acoustics and larger classrooms to comfortably fit all of the participants.

There were twenty young men who were accepted into the mentorship program and ten adult males who volunteered their time and resources to participate in the mentorship program. Two young men were assigned per one adult male, and were strategically sorted and arranged according to location of residence, schools, and church affiliations. Each mentor was challenged to engage and contact each young male at least twice per week and spend at a minimum eight hours per week in mentorship. Once the observation notes were sorted and arranged, the data revealed that the majority of the mentors were exceeding the expectations in contacts and spent hours. The data also revealed that all of the young men in the program were residing in single-parent homes with very little to no contact with their biological fathers. Upon further research of the data, several mentors reported a positive change in their mentees in respect to their mothers, siblings, schoolteachers, and persons in authority. Additionally, grade improvements were reported across the spectrum from an academic perspective as the

mentors became engaged in the mentees scholastic endeavors. Finally, the mentees learned a new skillset from their mentors that ranged from proper dressing, learning to fish, changing a flat tire, and cooking a full course meal. The data concluded that when positive men are involved in the day to day activities of young men's lives that have been abandoned by their biological fathers that drastic behavioral and academic achievements can be made. This reinforcement of demonstrating that a man cares enough to be there and support, correct, and reward the young man during his stages of life can yield positive outcomes in the development of productive young males.

The interview forms were collected, sorted and arranged into similarities based upon common themes that were addressed and identified during each session. Interviews were conducted on three separated occasions over a three-month period with an objective to fulfill a one-hour timeframe. All sessions were conducted in a confidential room to allow for an expressive, open and honest atmosphere. In most cases, the young sons and their single-parent mothers were present during the interviews. Although each interview session developed its own identity and flow of direction, specific questions were tailored to gauge and monitor the effects of fatherly absenteeism within the young male's life. The interviews were unique in the sense that all participants were hurting from this epidemic called fatherly absenteeism, but each affected individual expressed those pains differently, and furthermore, dealt with those painful realities differently. Due to this graphic and ambiguous nature, only a small strand of data could be synchronized to formulate a common theme. Gathering all the information from the interviews, the analyzed data revealed that deeply embedded within the neglected son and the single-parent mother is a strong desire to rekindle a healthy relationship with the absentee

father. When all the pain, hurt, confusion, and misguided biases are expressed concerning the absence of the biological father, there remains a longing for a relationship that seems innately magnetic. All interviewees expressed that they would not object to having a conversation with their biological fathers and perhaps entertaining the idea of engaging in some kind of fellowship to start a fresh, functional future with their absentee fathers.

When all of the analyzed data is gathered and triangulated, the conclusion is that there are residual and perpetual effects of fatherly absenteeism that manifest itself in many negative forms that attempts to demoralize the healthy development of the neglected young sons. Beneath the layers of feeling insignificant, abandoned, and confused about their painstaking reality of absenteeism is a small current of hope and aspiration to rise above their circumstance. The danger in this phenomenon is that the fight to overcome fatherly absenteeism is faint and can be quickly doused while perpetuating the cycle of fatherly absenteeism appears dynamic and functional. Therefore, the need to rescue young men who have been impaired by the epidemic of fatherly absenteeism becomes quite urgent if this vicious cycle is going to decrease and eventual subside. After three months of data collection and analysis, fatherly absenteeism has taken its toll on the African-American community but can be combated with initiatives and mentorships to regain a grasp on future generations of fathers that will epitomize the very essence of responsibility and character.

Summary of Methods for Data Collection

Since fatherly absenteeism is an epidemic in the African-American culture of the Twenty-First Century, and to further investigate its cause, systemic behavior, and overwhelmingly rhetorical effects, a qualitative research study was conducted to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the matter with methodologies that focused on smaller groups of individuals directly affected by absenteeism. Specifically, the qualitative research allowed for several methods to be implemented over a three-month period, which included interviews, case studies, and participant observations. The objective of the analysis was to secure an in depth understanding of fatherly absenteeism and its effects from ten African-American adolescent males and their single-parent mothers who willingly volunteered and participated in the research. These participants would provide an insight into their own immediate realities from a much smaller, yet intimate scale, while simultaneously providing data to further gain support for a research hypothesis.

At the conception of the research, single-parent mothers and their sons who were experiencing the absence of their biological father were identified from the Operation Save Our Sons initiative and who were members of the Moses Missionary Baptist Church. Completing a brief registration form that asked for the participant's general contact information, a brief statement describing the research, and their consent to participate, the research would begin with an interview that asked seven questions pertaining to their experience with fatherly absenteeism. Case studies and participant observations wholly focused on the neglected male adolescents in their natural environment with aspirations that positive male mentoring would enhance their

performance in life with improved behaviors and academics. While the interviews were conducted in small, confidential offices at the church, the case studies and participant observations would range from visitations at the school, their personal homes, and any extracurricular activities the young men may have been involved in. Several notes were taken in a chronological order categorizing the data to be analyzed at a later time. At the conclusion of the three-month period, the data was collected, read, analyzed, and coded. The overall theme that derived from the data collected concluded that fatherly absenteeism is an epidemic that has caused much hurt and confusion as to why the father abandoned his parental responsibilities yet there are aspirations and documented evidence that a positive engaged male in that same young male's life can yield productive results even in an absentee circumstance.

Interviews were conducted immediately following the implementation of Operation Save Our Sons, with the single-parent mothers and their sons. The interviews proved to be beneficial because it allowed an elicitation of the interviewee's perspective on fatherly absenteeism and how this condition has impaired their way of life. Each interview session was a one hour experience of free flowing, participatory conversation that was fluid and transparent, respectively on the subject of fatherly absenteeism. Open-ended questions were asked during each interview session of both the single-parent mother and their sons to further engage healthy conversation and to ensure thorough data and a comprehensive grasp of their painstaking reality. A general prayer was offered at the beginning of each session, with the permission of the interviewee, and also at the conclusion of each session. After the introductory prayer, participants were advised of the purpose of the research and to be as open and transparent as their comfort allowed them

to be. There were no participants that were interviewed who did not express a heavy, hurting emotional response in regards to the neglect encountered with fatherly absenteeism. Although the interview sessions did not reconcile abandoned sons to their absentee fathers, there was a sense of relief in the fact that these young men were given a positive environment and platform to express their reality and deeply rooted emotions.

Adult male mentors were assigned two young males to participant in a three-month case study. This method proved beneficial to the subject of fatherly absenteeism because it focused on a small, manageable group of individuals while allowing the study to be exploratory, constructive, and confirmatory. The objective of the case study was to determine if having a positive male role model in the life of young male absent of his biological father would positively enhance his life with tangible evidence of improvement. From an exploratory stance, the mentors were able to gain and create a new knowledge of the subject matter that exceeded their preconceived biases and allowing the mentorship to evolve into its own identity during the case study. By allowing this phenomenon to occur, further data could be captured and analyzed to holistically grasp a comprehensive understanding of fatherly absenteeism and its effects on those who are abandoned. Additionally, from a constructive stance in the case study, the presence of the male role models drastically improved the behaviors of the young men in their level of respect towards their mothers, other individuals, and themselves. Along with behavioral and conduct improvements, the case study also revealed an improvement in scholastic excellence. Several of the young men experienced a whole grade improvement. Finally, the case study also demonstrated a confirmatory approach considering that much research has been conducted on the subject matter and has already

proven that positive male mentors in the lives of challenged young men neglected by their biological fathers can have a significant progressive impact in the lives of those young men.

Although there were over 300 registered participants in the Operation Save Our Sons initiative and over 125 of those participants being young men under eighteen years of age, it was imperative that the research would focus on a numerically smaller group of individuals that would allow for interviews, case studies, and participant observations to be more thorough and exhaustive. Within these parameters, the single-parent mothers and the abandoned young men could perhaps feel significant enough to warrant some attention to be given to their actuality and daily experience. As expressed in many of the interviews, case studies and participant observations, fatherly absenteeism is not just merely an absence of a parent, but also a total and reckless neglect of the importance of spending quality time with their sons.

Conclusion

The completion and culmination of the project was undoubtedly the most rewarding work in my ministerial journey. The implementation the project proved to be a much-needed emphasis and concentrated work in my ministry context. Birth from my own painful experience, it was beneficial to host the initiative Operation Save Our Sons, and the positive impact that this summit had on the attendees were life changing, beneficial, and uplifting. The launching of the project authenticated my purpose for attending United Theological Seminary, and renewed life within me to continue the work far beyond my doctoral studies. It was refreshing in the sense and purpose that my project

was really twofold: the project itself became more than just earning a doctoral degree, but in a real sense an opportunity to engage in meaningful ministry; and, the more work personally invested in the project, the more of the realization that the project was about my own deficiencies, experience, healing and deliverance. These illuminations compelled me to reach beyond the basic expectations and strive to become a project of excellence. With this mindset and the feedback from the participants, we have decided that the model in ministry must be a continual, fluid, and resourceful effort with intentionality to tackle the epidemics of fatherly absenteeism in the African-American communities.

The project also challenged me to do a self-evaluation of some personal, yet critical life situations that help evolve my motivation and passion to assist in the cause against fatherly absenteeism in the African-American culture. There was the recognition of leftover pain that was hidden and nestled in my spirit that needed to be emptied before meaningful ministry could occur outside of my own insecurities. This project first challenged me to forgive the person who hurt me most with fatherly absenteeism while simultaneously recognizing the gap fillers whom God sent in my life as suitable replacements to foster fatherhood and demonstrate an embracing love towards me. Additionally, the project heightened my awareness that a perpetual cycle of absentee fathers were brewing in my immediate context and community, and consequently, a perpetual cycle of children were feeling the same exasperated and exhausted emotions of neglect I experienced as a child. This awareness challenged me to gravitate towards the cause of the project with a more sincere hope of rescuing both the absentee father and the abandoned child to break this repeated chain of absenteeism, which has reached epidemic proportions.

Partnering with Dr. Charles E. Goodman, Jr., and the Historic Tabernacle Baptist Church, several hundred persons to include single-parent mothers, determined men to be mentors, and youth of all ages, gathered at a historically Black high school and hosted the project. Several hundred persons registered, and even more persons were in attendance. Surveys were completed, classes were taught uniquely to men, women, and our sons. The panelists were professionals in the area of expertise, ranging from educators to law officials, to professional counselors. We were well prepared in scholarship and academia to address the issue of absenteeism, but set our expectations of participation and community involvement too low. We did not have adequate spacing to accommodate the attendees; the classrooms were too small and inadequate of equipment with the technology necessary to foster a sound-learning environment. We had several vendors and sponsors, but we started too late networking with the community and soliciting support from mainline contributors. Many potential partnerships wanted to assist and participate but we gave them the information too late. To be very efficient and to host a worthwhile effort, the project should have begun at least six to nine months in advance with the solicitation of donors, participants, volunteers and other community resources.

This project, however, is going to outlive my pursuit of a doctorate, and perhaps my lifetime. The greatest obstacle that stood before me was the acknowledgment of the pain and unhealed hurts in my spiritual journey. Embedded within those same pains and hurts was a prescriptive antidote for fatherly absenteeism. Progressively healing from the circumstances of fatherly absenteeism that was beyond my control helped to better realize what was in my control. God was preparing me through my spiritual journey as a child to an adult to be the catalyst and voice that would speak and bring healing to a residual

effect of slavery that has crippled the African-American community through fatherly absenteeism. It is my conclusion that sound biblical liberation that speaks to the historical dilemmas such as slavery, coupled with theological ideas and theoretical expertise can produce an outcome that weakens the epidemic of fatherly absenteeism in the African-American community. This paradigm has proven to be true for me and the participants in this project and should be considered in future instances of fatherly absenteeism in the African-American culture of the Twenty-First Century. Ultimately, if implemented within various churches and communities, it will serve as a valuable tool in eradicating fatherly absenteeism.

APPENDIX A
INVITATION LETTER

Greetings!

On behalf of the Historic Tabernacle Baptist Church and the Moses Missionary Baptist Church, we would like to cordially invite you to participate as a Panelist in the Augusta Chapter of ***Operation Save Our Sons, Inc.*** This event will take place on **March 15th, 2014, at 9AM**, in the gymnasium of **Lucy C. Laney High School**. Your expertise and demonstrated leadership would provide valuable information that will help remedy the abnormalities of fatherly absenteeism in the African-American community.

Dr. Charles E. Goodman and Dr. Corey D. Brown, respective pastors of the two host churches, have partnered together to bring awareness and healing to this dilemma, and would really appreciate the availing of your time to share with the Augusta communities. As one of several panelists, you will be given the opportunity to answer prepared questions that address fatherly absenteeism from your field of experience and how the community should respond to this epidemic.

If your calendar avails you this opportunity and you would like to participate, please contact Dr. Corey D. Brown directly at the information below. Upon confirming your attendance, you will be provided the list of questions in advance to help prepare you to give thorough answers. Although the event begins at 9AM, the Panelist Discussion is scheduled from 11AM to 12:30PM.

We really appreciate your consideration, and we hope that you are available to join us in this much-needed discussion within our community. A flyer has been attached for your perusal. Again, we look forward to hearing from you!

Greetings!

On behalf of the Historic Tabernacle Baptist Church and the Moses Missionary Baptist Church, we would like to cordially invite you to participate as a Teacher in the Augusta Chapter of ***Operation Save Our Sons, Inc.*** This event will take place on **March 15th, 2014, at 9AM**, in the gymnasium of **Lucy C. Laney High School**. Your expertise and demonstrated leadership would provide valuable information that will help remedy the abnormalities of fatherly absenteeism in the African-American community.

Dr. Charles E. Goodman and Dr. Corey D. Brown, respective pastors of the two host churches, have partnered together to bring awareness and healing to this dilemma, and would really appreciate the availing of your time to share with the Augusta communities. As one of several teachers, you will be given the opportunity to share your perspectives that address fatherly absenteeism from your field of experience and how the community should respond to this epidemic.

If your calendar avails you this opportunity and you would like to participate, please contact Dr. Corey D. Brown directly at the information below. Upon confirming your attendance, you will be provided the specifics on your class. Although the event begins at 9AM, the Classroom Breakout Sessions are scheduled from 10AM to 11AM.

We really appreciate your consideration, and we hope that you are available to join us in this much-needed discussion within our community. A flyer has been attached for your perusal. Again, we look forward to hearing from you!

Coordinators of *Operation Save Our Sons*
Augusta, GA 30901
February 13th, 2014

Dear Community Sponsor:

Rev. Dr. Corey D. Brown of the Moses Missionary Baptist Church and Rev. Dr. Charles E. Goodman of the Historic Tabernacle Baptist Church are collaborating to launch a franchise of Operation Save Our Sons for the communities of Augusta and the CSRA on March 15th, 2014, from 9AM to 1PM at Lucy C. Laney High School of Augusta, GA.

“*Operation Save Our Sons* is a national initiative, launched in Jacksonville, Florida, designed to equip teenage males, particularly African-American with the life skills needed to be successful and productive. This initiative, which creates partnership between several organizations, was founded by Dr. John E. Guns, Senior Pastor of the St. Paul Church of Jacksonville, Inc., and is designed to inspire males to strive for excellence for the sake of their personal future, the community, and the country. The *Operation Save Our Sons* initiative will empower young boys to maximize their potential for positive civic impact through contributions to their families and their community.”

This letter is concerning a sponsorship opportunity to launch the Augusta Chapter on March 15th. We know that your corporation has the desire to give back to the local community, and your contribution in cash or kind would be greatly appreciated. Donations collected will be used to provide lunch, snacks, promotional items, and needed materials for this event. We are anxiously looking forward to tremendous improvement of the communities in Augusta and the CSRA through this program.

As a sponsor, you will have the unique opportunity to be a vendor at the event; your company logo will be hoisted on all banners and advertisements concerning this event; and a tax ID could be provided to you at your request for tax donation purposes.

We are looking forward to partnering with you to build a bright future for our children, which will build a better community. If you have additional questions, please contact Rev. Dr. Corey D. Brown at 706-627-1642.

Sincerely,
Rev. Dr. Corey D. Brown
Rev. Dr. Charles E. Goodman, Jr.

Rev. Dr. Corey D. Brown
Rev. Dr. Charles E. Goodman, Jr.
Coordinators of *Operation Save Our Sons*
Augusta, GA 30901
February 13th, 2014

Dear Community Partner:

Rev. Dr. Corey D. Brown of the Moses Missionary Baptist Church and Rev. Dr. Charles E. Goodman of the Historic Tabernacle Baptist Church are collaborating to launch a franchise of *Operation Save Our Sons* for the communities of Augusta and the CSRA on March 15th, 2014, from 9AM to 1PM at Lucy C. Laney High School of Augusta, GA.

“*Operation Save Our Sons* is a national initiative, launched in Jacksonville, Florida, designed to equip teenage males, particularly African-American with the life skills needed to be successful and productive. This initiative, which creates partnership between several organizations, was founded by Dr. John E. Guns, Senior Pastor of the St. Paul Church of Jacksonville, Inc., and is designed to inspire males to strive for excellence for the sake of their personal future, the community, and the country. The Operation Save Our Sons initiative will empower young boys to maximize their potential for positive civic impact through contributions to their families and their community.”

This letter serves to provide you with a unique opportunity to be a vendor at the launch of the Augusta Chapter on March 15th. There is a \$50.00 fee for all vendors to participate in this event. As a vendor, you will be able to set up a table to showcase and promote your products and services. Please make checks payable to: CD Brown Ministries.

We are looking forward to partnering with you to build a bright future for our children, which will build a better community. If you have additional questions, please contact Rev. Dr. Corey D. Brown at 706-627-1642.

Sincerely,

Rev. Dr. Corey D. Brown

Rev. Dr. Charles E. Goodman, Jr.

APPENDIX B

OPERATION SAVE OUR SONS EVENT FLOW



Event Flow

8:00am-8:45am

- ❖ Registration and Vendor Set Up – MMBC Hospitality Ministry, TAB Volunteers, MMBC Men’s Ministry

9:00am-10:00am

- ❖ Event Coordinator/Director of Operations – Dr. Tujuana Wiggins (Principal of Deer Chase Elementary)
- ❖ Welcome and Prayer – Dr. Robert Bush (Retired Educator)
- ❖ Skit – Raymond Mann, III
- ❖ Purpose of Event/History of Fatherly Absenteeism – Rev. Dr. Corey D. Brown

10:00am-11:00am

- ❖ Break Out Sessions
 1. Fatherless Sons (You Can Do This!) – Dr. Charles E. Goodman, Jr.
 2. Men for Mentors (We Can Do This! Brothas) – Greg Davis, MBA
 3. Single Mothers (We Can Do This! Sistas) – Min. Shavonne Williams, BS

11:00am-12:00pm

- ❖ Panel Discussion (8 Panelist)
 1. Educator – Dr. Ronald Wiggins (T.W. Josey High School)
 2. Counselor – Dr. Laura Wheat (Prof at GRU)
 3. Law Enforcement – Pastor Elliott Bing (Dept. of Juvenile Justice)
 4. State Representative – Alisha Morgan (GA House of Representatives)
 5. Single father – Brian Anderson (Certified Peer Specialist, Recovery Educator, GRU)
 6. Pastor – Dr. K.B. Martin (Senior Pastor, Community Activist)
 7. Successful man – Commissioner Corey Johnson
 8. Historian – Dr. Catherine L. Adams (Humanities Chair, Paine College)

12:00pm-1:00pm

- ❖ Lunch
- ❖ DJ Jam Session
- ❖ Raffle – Dr. Tujuana Wiggins and Hospitality/Volunteers

1:00pm-2:00pm

Clean Up – MMBC Men’s Ministry, Tab Volunteers, Others

All persons named on this flow sheet should have a badge for the event. Please see registration table or Dr. Tujuana Wiggins

APPENDIX C
PRE AND POST EVENT SURVEY

Pre-Event Survey

1. Which best describes you?
 - a. Son
 - b. Single Mother
 - c. Single Father
 - d. Not Applicable

2. How many hours per week do you have contact with your father?
 - a. 0-5
 - b. 5-10
 - c. 10-15
 - d. 15 or more
 - e. Not Applicable

3. How significant it is to have a father figure or a male role model in your life?
 - a. Very Significant
 - b. Somewhat Significant
 - c. Neutral
 - d. Not Significant

4. Do you have a male role model in your life?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Not Applicable

5. How many hours per week would you want your father/male role model to spend with you?
 - a. 0-5
 - b. 5-10
 - c. 10-15
 - d. 15 or More
 - e. Not Applicable

6. Where do you need the most help? Circle all that applies.
 - a. Personal
 - b. Educational

- c. Occupational
- d. Financial
- e. I do not need any help

7. Do you feel fathers are necessary in today's society?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Not Applicable

Post-Event Survey

1. How beneficial was this workshop?
 - a. Very beneficial
 - b. Somewhat beneficial
 - c. Neutral
 - d. Not beneficial
2. How often would you like to participate in these workshops?
 - a. Once per month
 - b. Once per quarter
 - c. Bi-Annually
 - d. Annually
3. Rate the organization of the event
 - a. Very organized
 - b. Somewhat organized
 - c. Neutral
 - d. Disorganized
4. How beneficial were the topics discussed?
 - a. Very Beneficial
 - b. Somewhat beneficial
 - c. Neutral
 - d. Not Beneficial
5. On a scale of 1-5 with 5 being the highest, rate the venue
 - a. 1
 - b. 2
 - c. 3
 - d. 4
 - e. 5

Comments: In the space below, please provide us with your feedback on how we could improve future events and activities that you would like to see incorporated in this event.

Thank You

APPENDIX D

OPERATION SAVE OUR SONS RAFFLE PRIZES



Raffle Prizes

1. (2) \$25 COSTCO Gift Cards – Should be given to 2 different adult women raffle winners
2. (1) Fishing Pole – Should be given to a male ages 13+
3. (2) Men's Watches – Should be given to a male ages 13+
4. (2) Men's Leather Belts – Should be given to a males in middle/high school
5. (1) Football – Should be given to male ages 7-12
6. (1) Basketball – Should be given to male ages 7-12
7. (1) 5 Pack Car Kit – Should be given to male ages 4-11
8. (2) Men's Body Wash – Should be given to males 13+
9. (2) Men's Leather Wallets – Should be given to males in middle/high school
10. (12) Chik-Fil-A Gift Bags – Should be given to female winners of all ages

Dr. Wiggins will decide who will draw numbers from the raffle bin. Winners should be instructed to go to the concession stand to claim their prize. Persons should be awarded their gifts based upon the information above. **Raffle personnel will need to decide which gift best suits the needs of the winner.** We **WILL NOT** announce what the raffle drawing is for because we do not know who will win the drawing. Please attempt to put small items in a gift bag. Thank you!

APPENDIX E

OPERATION SAVE OUR SONS REGISTRATION FORM

APPENDIX F

QUESTIONS REGARDING ABSENTEE FATHERS

Questions Regarding Absentee Fathers

(Briefly introduce each panelist, their vocation, and years of service in the community)

1. What challenges do you notice in youth and adolescents that are without a consistent father figure in their life? What are their typical struggles from your area of expertise?
2. What causes have occurred that may be contributing to a spiraling effect of absent fathers, particularly in the African-American (Black) communities?
3. Is the male figure a necessity in the positive development of children as it were in earlier centuries? If so, how? (For single moms who may disregard the need for fathers).
4. Where are our fathers in this current generation and what has contributed to their absence as fathers?
5. Is it possible for a child to be a positive, productive, law-abiding citizen without the influence of their biological father or a positive male influence?
6. What innate characteristics do you see within a son who has been abandoned or neglected by his father?
7. Is it possible for an abandoned son to replicate negligent behaviors of the father without being exposed to the father?
8. Have you seen the benefits of a positive male role model alter the behaviors of a child neglected by their father? If so, how?
9. Speaking from your area of expertise, what would you like to contribute (say) that may help create a positive change in response to fatherly absenteeism in the African-American (Black) community? (To the child, the mother, the absent father, and community).

10. Where should the weight of responsibility be placed when rearing a child with an absentee father? The church? The school? The judicial or governmental system?
11. What message do absentee fathers need to hear that may possibly cause them to reconsider their negligence in regards to their children?
12. Are there resources available to our youth and adolescents that are facing fatherly absenteeism? If so, what?

Briefly, as a panelist, what contributed to your success that helped you overcome some of your struggles as a youth and adolescent?

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